

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



Swami Vivekananda and World Culture
January 2013

Vol. 118, No. 1

₹ 50.00

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

The Great Teachers of the World – I



THE universe, according to the theory of the Hindus, is moving in cycles of wave forms. It rises, reaches its zenith, then falls and remains in the hollow, as it were, for some time, once more to rise, and so on, in wave after wave and fall after fall. What is true of the universe is true of every part of it. The march of human affairs is like that. The history of nations is like that: they rise and they fall; after the rise comes a fall, again out of the fall comes a rise, with greater power. This motion is always going on. In the religious world the same movement exists. In every nation's spiritual life, there is a fall as well as a rise. The nation goes down, and everything seems to go to pieces. Then, again, it gains strength, rises; a huge wave comes, sometimes a tidal wave—and always on the topmost crest of the wave is a shining soul, the Messenger. Creator and created by turns, he is the impetus that makes the wave rise, the nation rise: at the same time, he is created by the same forces which make the wave, acting and interacting by turns. He puts forth his tremendous power upon society; and society makes him what he is. These are the great world-thinkers. These are the Prophets of the world, the Messengers of life, the Incarnations of God.

Man has an idea that there can be only one religion, that there can be only one Prophet, and that there can be only

one Incarnation; but that idea is not true. By studying the lives of all these great Messengers, we find that each, as it were, was destined to play a part, and a part only; that the harmony consists in the sum total and not in one note. As in the life of races—no race is born to alone enjoy the world. None dare say no. Each race has a part to play in this divine harmony of nations. Each race has its mission to perform, its duty to fulfil. The sum total is the great harmony.

So, not any one of these Prophets is born to rule the world for ever. None has yet succeeded and none is going to be the ruler for ever. Each only contributes a part; and, as to that part, it is true that in the long run every Prophet will govern the world and its destinies. But, in the history of mankind, you will find that there come these Messengers, and that from their very birth their mission is found and formed. One moment I think that I am spiritual, that I am moral; and the next moment, a blow comes, and I am thrown flat on my back. And why?—I have lost faith in myself, my moral backbone is broken.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.120-134.

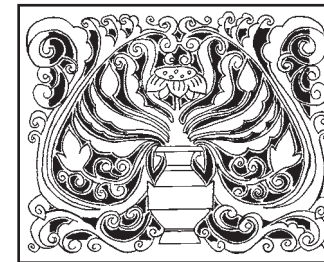


PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

Vol. 118, No. 1
January 2013



Amrita Kalasha

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt Champawat · 262 524
Uttarakhand, India
Email: prabuddhabharata@gmail.com
pb@advaitaashrama.org

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road
Kolkata · 700 014
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2264 0898 / 2264 4000
2286 6450 / 2286 6483
Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

INTERNET EDITION AT:

www.advaitaashrama.org

Cover design and layout
in collaboration with Alimpan Ghosh

Contents

Traditional Wisdom	1
Editorial: Swami Vivekananda and World Culture	2
Psychological Ideas of Swami Vivekananda Swami Nityasthananda	5
Vivekananda and the Clash of Thought Linda Prugh	13
Vivekananda and the Worship of Kali in the West Swami Bhajananda Saraswati	23
Some Aspects of Vivekananda Literature Dr M Sivaramkrishna	33
Swami Vivekananda and Science Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee	43
Vivekananda's Ideal of Service: A New Path to Liberation Swami Nirantarananda	57
Cultural Transference and Swami Vivekananda Swami Samarpanananda	67

Vivekananda: The Bridge between the East and the West <i>Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana</i>	75
Vivekananda's Thoughts on Education <i>Prof. Sumita Roy</i>	81
Meditation and Yoga: Face of the Future <i>Swami Satyamayananda</i>	87
Vivekananda's Impact on American Spirituality <i>Pravrajika Brahmaprana</i>	93
Swami Vivekananda's Experiences in China <i>William Page</i>	101
Swami Vivekananda on Language <i>Pankaj Dwivedi</i>	109
Vivekananda's Lasting Contribution to World Peace <i>Dr Anil Baran Ray</i>	117
Swami Vivekananda's Views on Superconsciousness <i>Dr R Lekshmi</i>	123
Vivekananda's Appeal for America <i>Neil B Feldman and Judy S Feldman</i>	129
Vivekananda's Rereading of Vedanta <i>Swami Narasimhananda</i>	141
The Growing Relevance of Vedanta <i>Dr Karan Singh</i>	149
Vivekananda on India's Religious Landscape <i>P S Sundaram</i>	155
Reviews	163
Reports	168



TO OUR READERS

To commemorate Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary, the January 2013 special issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* is devoted to 'Swami Vivekananda and World Culture'. But what has Swami Vivekananda to do with world culture?

Defining culture is difficult because a host of meanings have been attached to this word. All noble human thought and behaviour influences culture and are influenced by it. There are different cultures, each one unique, being the result of groups of people living in different parts of the world trying to conquer their specific environments. Taken together, all cultures of the world are a magnificent tapestry of the human mind. No one is higher or lower, they are just different. Therefore, all the cultures have a place in human development; not one should be tampered or destroyed, they are our human legacy, because what makes us quintessentially human is culture.

As we are entering the age of science, technology, and information a new type of culture is emerging. Present humanity has become global, because the challenges are global. In this exciting age of discoveries, humans are rediscovering themselves through a tremendous explosion of knowledge related to the microcosm and the macrocosm. The expanding mental horizon is having a tremendous impact on us. One of the

salient developments in this process, probably the most important, is an increasing awareness of a common human consciousness. This awareness is resulting in an overwhelming sense of responsibility to ourselves, individually and collectively; an awareness that values each person, each community as precious. And this understanding is extending beyond humans to reach all life. A universal culture is being created and there are clear indications that this age is tending to become the finest flowering of human culture.

A universal culture obviously needs the highest generalization regarding what constitutes life. And what can be a higher generalization than spirituality? We will have to think of ourselves, of all life, and of everything around as spiritual. This is where Swami Vivekananda's life, words, and actions become relevant to world culture, for the swami preached and demonstrated that the highest spirituality is already in us. It is this realization that will make us truly universal, truly cultured.

As your journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, the spiritual and cultural journal started by Swamiji, enters its one hundred and eighteenth year of publication, we wish to thank all of you—patrons, subscribers, readers, contributors, reviewers, advertisers, donors, and well-wishers—for helping us carry forward Swami Vivekananda's legacy.

Subscribe to Prabuddha Bharata

- Become a Patron Subscriber and support the rich legacy left to all of us by Swami Vivekananda; patrons' names are published in Prabuddha Bharata.
- Prabuddha Bharata subscribers receive 10% discount on all Advaita Ashrama Publications.
- Send remittances in favour of Prabuddha Bharata by bank draft or money order to Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India. Or, **subscribe online** at www.advaitaashrama.org.
- Please note that we do not accept cheques.

Subscription Rates	India & Nepal	Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	United Kingdom	European Union	Other Countries
Annual	₹ 100	₹ 1,100	£ 18	€ 25	\$ 30 (USD)
Three Years	₹ 280	₹ 3,200	£ 50	€ 70	\$ 85
Life (20 years)	₹ 1,200	—	—	—	—
Patron (25 years)	₹ 2,000	—	—	—	—

Rates for online payment at www.advaitaashrama.org (by credit / debit card)				
	India & Nepal	Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	Other Countries	
Annual	(USD)	\$ 3	\$ 28	\$ 32
Three Years	(USD)	\$ 7.5	\$ 83	\$ 90
Life (20 years)	(USD)	\$ 30	—	—
Patron (25 years)	(USD)	\$ 50	—	—

(Rates in foreign currencies depend on current exchange rates and are therefore subject to change without notice)

Information for Subscribers

- Moving to a new address? Please let our Kolkata office know at least a month in advance so that your copy moves too.
- The number on the top line of your address label is your subscription number: please quote this number when writing to us. The month and year on the same line is the last month of your subscription.
- Subscriber copies are dispatched on the first or second day of every month. If you do not receive your copy by the last week of the month, please let us know so that we can send another copy.
- Renew your subscription online through our website.

Information for Contributors

- Unpublished original articles of universal and higher human interests pertaining to religion, spirituality, philosophy, psychology, education, values, and other social topics coming from competent writers of any country are considered for publication in Prabuddha Bharata.
- Articles should not exceed 2,500 words. Paucity of

- space precludes acceptance of longer articles for publication, except in rare cases. Articles must be submitted in typed—and preferably electronic—form.
- For all quotations in articles, adequate references—including name of author, title/publication, publisher with address, year of publication, and page number(s)—should be provided. Internet references should include name of author, website publisher, date, and full URL.
 - The Editor does not accept responsibility for views expressed in any articles.
 - Unsolicited articles are not individually acknowledged. The Editor will contact the contributor if an article is taken up for publication. Email addresses should be furnished where possible.
 - The Editor reserves the right to accept, reject, or effect necessary changes in articles on which no correspondence is possible.
 - Prabuddha Bharata does not undertake to return unsolicited materials.
 - Articles published in Prabuddha Bharata cannot be reproduced elsewhere without written permission from the Managing Editor.

You know how important Prabuddha Bharata is

in spreading the spiritual nectar of the Ramakrishna movement, the invigorating ideas of Vedanta, and the insights of Indian values and culture. Prabuddha Bharata also brings you inspirational reading material on a wide variety of topics of global interest.

You value this journal and the cause it represents, and would surely like to share it with others.

How you can contribute:

- **Gift** subscriptions to your friends and family, and encourage your thinking friends to subscribe.
- **Sponsor** a subscription for a worthy library or institution known to you, or let us choose one.
- **Contribute** to the **Prabuddha Bharata Permanent Fund** and help ensure the longevity of the journal.
- **Advertise** your company in the Prabuddha Bharata and encourage your colleagues to do so.



PRABUDDHA BHARATA or AWAKENED INDIA

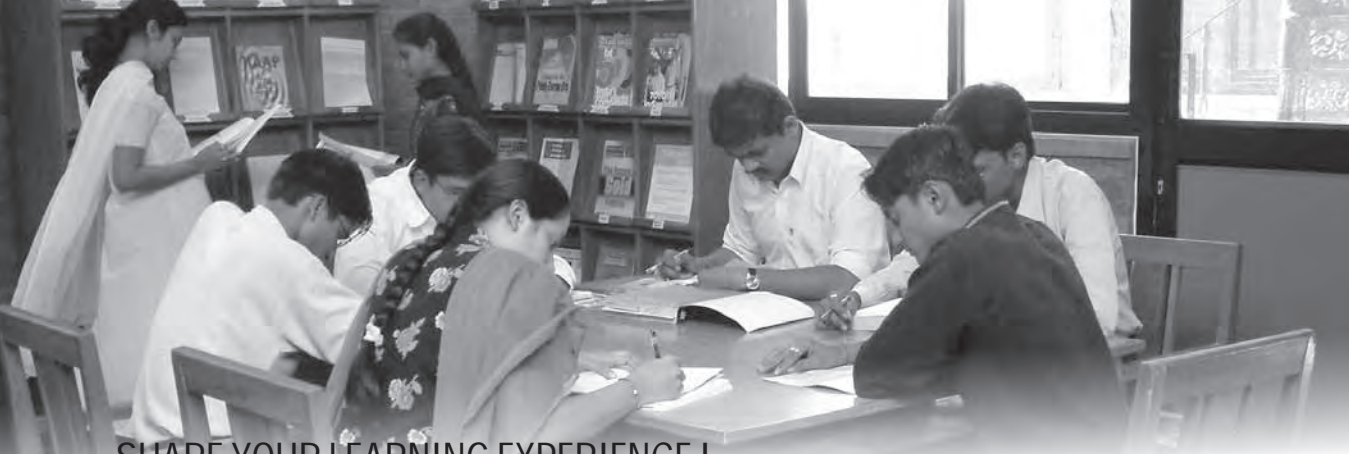
Send to: Advaita Ashrama 5 Dehi Entally Road Kolkata 700 014

Yes, I would like to

- ☐ **Gift** life subscriptions to Prabuddha Bharata at ₹ 1200 each
- ☐ **Sponsor** libraries and institutions for 20 years at ₹ 1200 each
- ☐ **Donate** ₹ to the Prabuddha Bharata Permanent Fund

Amount of ₹ is enclosed herewith by draft / money order

	PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS	Send my gift subscriptions to:
Your Name		
Address		
PIN		
Email address		
Phone No		
Date		
Details of DD		



SHARE YOUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE !

GIFT PRABUDDHA BHARATA TO LIBRARIES !

PRABUDDHA BHARATA LIBRARY INITIATIVE

Let many more benefit from the thought-provoking contents read by you every month in *Prabuddha Bharata*. Join the Prabuddha Bharata Library Initiative by gifting a life subscription to a library. You can either gift it to the library of your choice or to the library selected by us. Your name, along with the name of the library you sponsor, will be published in the Prabuddha Bharata. Come, sponsor as many libraries as you can and spread the ethos of Indian Culture.

Prabuddha Bharata Library Initiative:

Name of Sponsor

136. P S Varma, Hyderabad

137. "

Beneficiary Library

A V C College Library, Mayiladuthurai.

A W College, R S Tambe Library, Otur.

Prabuddha Bharata Patron Subscribers:

451. Tamal Ghosh, Kolkata.

452. Vivek Khosla, New Delhi.

Send my gift subscriptions to:

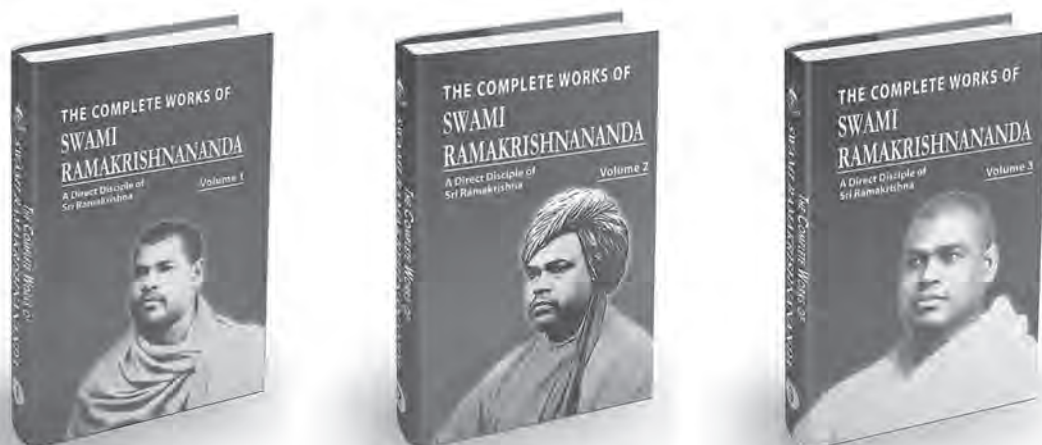
PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK LETTERS



LIFE CARE • 204/1B LINTON STREET, KOLKATA 700014

Swami Ramakrishnananda's 150th Birthday Special Publication

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA



Swami Ramakrishnananda (Shashi Maharaj), a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna wrote and spoke on a wide range of subjects, besides penning numerous letters to monks and devotees. *The Complete Works of Swami Ramakrishnananda* in three volumes bring together all his available writings in English, with translations from Bengali and Sanskrit.

Hardbound. Vol. 1, Pp.xlii + 469. Vol. 2, Pp.v + 462, and Vol. 3, Pp.vi + 542.

Price: Each Volume Rs.180/- , Complete Set (3 volumes) Rs.540/-
+ Postage (by registered packet): Rs. 30/- for single volume, Rs.40/- for two volumes and Rs.50/- for the complete set. *No request for VPP entertained.*



Published by
Sri Ramakrishna Math,
Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004
Email: mail@chennai.math.org

Saving the Earth



Can begin at home

Install Sudarshan Saur Solar Water Heater

Each time you have a bath, you can contribute to a global purpose.
Sudarshan Saur consumes NO electricity and provides warm water, 24x7.
In fact, it replaces the geyser which is one of the highest electricity consuming appliances.

Let's begin saving the Earth. By saving electricity.



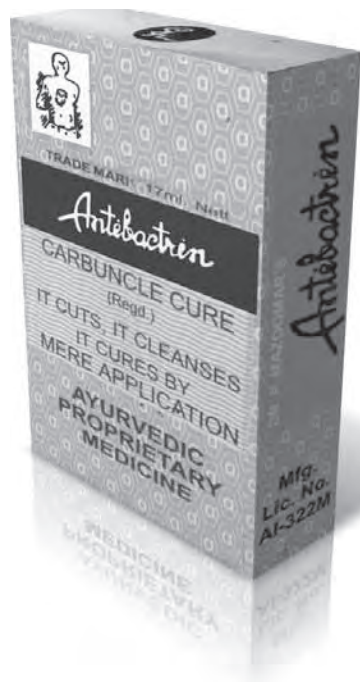
Sudarshan Saur

SOLAR WATER HEATER

Toll Free No. : 1800 233 4545



For trade enquiry write to **SUDARSHAN SAUR SHAKTI PVT. LTD.** 5, Tarak Colony, Opp. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama,
Beed by-pass, Aurangabad - 431 005 (Maharashtra, India). Mail: office@sudarshansaur.com | www.sudarshansaur.com



**IT CUTS !
IT CLEANSES !!
IT CURES !!!**



Antebactrin®

Easy remedy for burns, sores, sinus, and other bacterial infections. Trusted by generations, this is a household essential.

Contact: 30A Annada Banerjee Lane, Kolkata 700 020

Have you heard of the ICE Awards?

It has something for you.

Curious?



visit

www.iceawards.in

A Shailaja Nair Foundation Initiative

FEI
Title sponsors

Pluga®
German Collaboration

World's Best Submersible Pumps

- Complete Stainless Steel Motor Body
- NORYL Made Pump Ensures Safe Drinking Water
- After Sales Service within 24 hours

Authorised Distributors:
Engineering Equipments & Traders
33 Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata 700 012
Phone: 2236-2292, 2234-4250/51
Fax: 2211-4341. Email: ssaepl@vsnl.net



TECHNO ENGINEERING

- Overhauling and maintenance of ESP & other allied work.
- Overhauling of boiler pressure and non-pressure parts.
- Annual maintenance of aviation obstruction light at 220 M high chimney.
- Erection & maintenance of coal handling plant.
- Overhauling of coal mill.
- Erection & commissioning of dry fly ash handling system.
- Ammonia flue gas conditioning system (AFGC).
- Erection of CFBC boiler.
- Structural fabrication & erection works for ore handling plant.
- Annual maintenance of boiler (500 X 2).

Registered Office: Hirapur, Deriachak, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal 721 151

Administrative Office: Padmabati Bhawan, Kakdihi, Mecheda, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal 721 137

Phone No: 03228-231 651 (O) • 03228-251 696, 231 706 (R) • Fax: 03228-231 366

Mobile: 9434054982/9434743707/9932878759

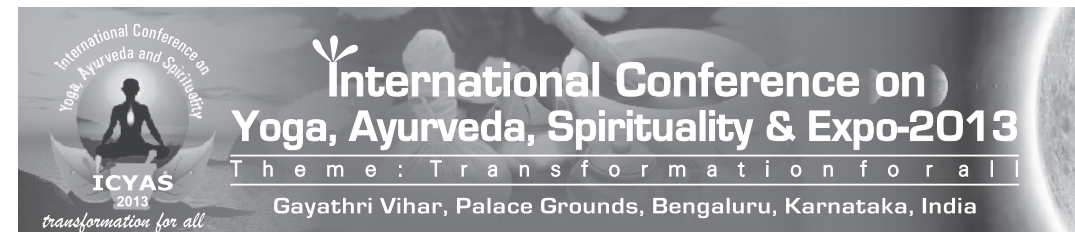
Email: deychandan12319@rediffmail.com • Website: www.technoengineering.co.in



We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda



Date: 2nd to 6th, January 2013, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Organized by

YOGA, AYURVEDA AND SPIRITUALITY

Are born in Ancient India and have been practiced by Yogic and Spiritual Gurus for Thousands of Years

Now, in this great place of Bengaluru

World's

1st International Conference on
YOGA AYURVEDA
SPIRITUALITY & EXPO - 2013

Highlights of the event

10,000 Delegate Participation expected

Great Opportunity to Launch your Products through Ambassadors / High Commissioners*

Wisdom Show (Gyan Sabha) Face to Face Program with many Saints, Swamijis and Scientists from 2nd to 5th, January 2013, Every evening 6 PM to 7 PM for Students* to ask any questions on Life/Subjects

FREE Consultation Training and Demo of different healing system for all the expo visitors for many diseases

Expo-2013 having more than 200 stalls promoting Yoga, Ayurveda and Spirituality, **Contact: +91 9945000882**

Group of 15 delegate registration will **GET** 1 delegate registration **FREE**

2.0 Lakhs Tickets will be pre sold for the Expo, **Contact: +91 9611158385**

WIN AIR TICKET FROM BANGALORE- BALI (INDONESIA)- BANGALORE THROUGH LUCKY DRAW

Lucky draw for visitors every day

Lucky draw for a Exhibitor*, Delegate* & Ticket Seller*

Lucky draw for Healer/Therapist who brings 15 delegates + does pre-conference with approval, anywhere in the world, **Contact: +91 8884929475**

DELEGATE REGISTRATION

National Delegate	Student Delegate	International Delegate	Dormitory Accommodation
Rs. 1,500/- (Excluding Accommodation)	Rs. 1000/- (Excluding Accommodation)	US \$ 50/- (Excluding Accommodation)	₹ 800/- (for five days, on request only)

for Accommodation please visit our website icyas.org or contact +91 96204 01224

International Delegates please Contact

Mr. Varadan Chandar

M: +91 9840926164,

E: varadanchandar@gmail.com

National Delegates, Please Contact

Mr. Vinay Kumar M C

M: +91 8884929474

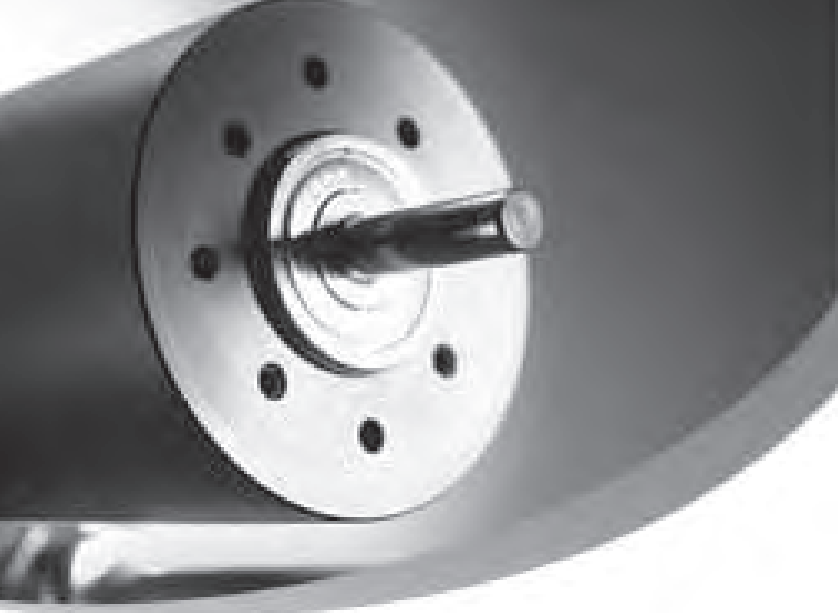
E: vinmc6789@gmail.com, icyas2013@gmail.com

Address and Contact details:

Sri Yogi Devaraj, Secretary General, International Conference on Yoga, Ayurveda, Spirituality and Expo - 2013 Secretariat,
2, Siddharuda Nilaya, 8th main, 13th A Cross, Judicial Layout, Allalasaandra, GKV Post, Bengaluru- 560065.

visit our webiste: www.icyas.org Email us: icyas2013@gmail.com

Media Partner
LifePositive
YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO PERSONAL GROWTH



KASC

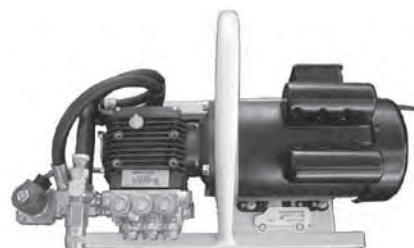
- Measurement and Testing Instruments
- Data Acquisition Systems
- Encoders
- Motion Controllers
- Pressure Calibrators
- Pressure Controllers
- Pressure Scanners

Indian Marketers of:

MDS
AERO SUPPORT CORPORATION

Pressure Systems Inc.

FAULHABER



KRISHNA AGENCIES AND SERVICES COMPANY

163, 37th Cross, 7th Main, 5th Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 560041, India
Phone: 91-80-26630927 / 26630370; Fax: 91-80-2663-0927; Email: kpadegal@vsnl.com

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS SANGHA

Swami Vireswarananda
(Tenth President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission)

[The advent of Sri Ramakrishna, in the perspective of world history, has thrown open the floodgate of a spiritual force of unprecedented magnitude. To harness this energy and direct it for the good of humanity, Sri Ramakrishna had gathered round him a few chosen and dedicated disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda who were to prepare the channel through which would flow this new energy, providing the new interpretation and reaffirmation of the fundamentals of India's age-old spiritual values to give mankind the moorings it needed. This was necessary not only for the regeneration of India but for countering the materialistic outlook which had engulfed the whole world. Swami Vivekananda founded the twin organizations, the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, at different times after the passing away of his Master in 1886. The great Swamiji made these two organizations the vehicle and medium for giving practical shape to his Master's teachings. When framing rules for the guidance of the headquarters of the organization, Swami Vivekananda observed, 'This Bharat will again be awake. And the huge wave that has originated from this centre will like a great inundation envelop the whole of mankind and carry it towards the gate of emancipation. This is our faith and we have girded up our loins for achieving this through successive generations of our disciples.' According to Swami Vivekananda the Sangha is the physical body of the Great Master.¹ Whoever does Swamiji's work grows in strength, there is no doubt about it. He prescribed for us this path of work, 'for our own salvation and for the good of the world'. The stress is on the former and the latter is only a by-product as it is your sadhana through work. The way to do such work was taught by the Lord to Arjuna: 'Therefore remember me always and fight' and the result will be, 'Be not distressed, you will be victorious against all odds' and not only that, 'You shall doubtless come to Me'. This is the guarantee held out to us by the Lord himself and which he has restated in this age in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. We have wasted many lives and it is worth giving a trial to this great ideal this time. Things have been made so easy for us by Sri Ramakrishna to attain the goal, if only we should care to take advantage of it.²



As individuals we are all separate but integrated as a whole. We are a part of Sri Ramakrishna—the Sri Ramakrishna Sangha—and to that Sangha I offer my salutations. To you all, I give my blessings in the name of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji. May they see that our lives are purposeful and fruitful and not wasted in acquiring selfish ends, but spent for the good and happiness of the many: 'bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya'. May they all bless you with strength to carry this out.³

¹ Souvenir of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Convention 1980, 1–2.

² Letter written to Pravrajika Mokshaprana by Swami Vireswarananda on 27.10.1949, published in 'Pravrajika Mokshaprana', Sri Sarada Math, Baisakh 1408 BS, 2002 CE, 66.

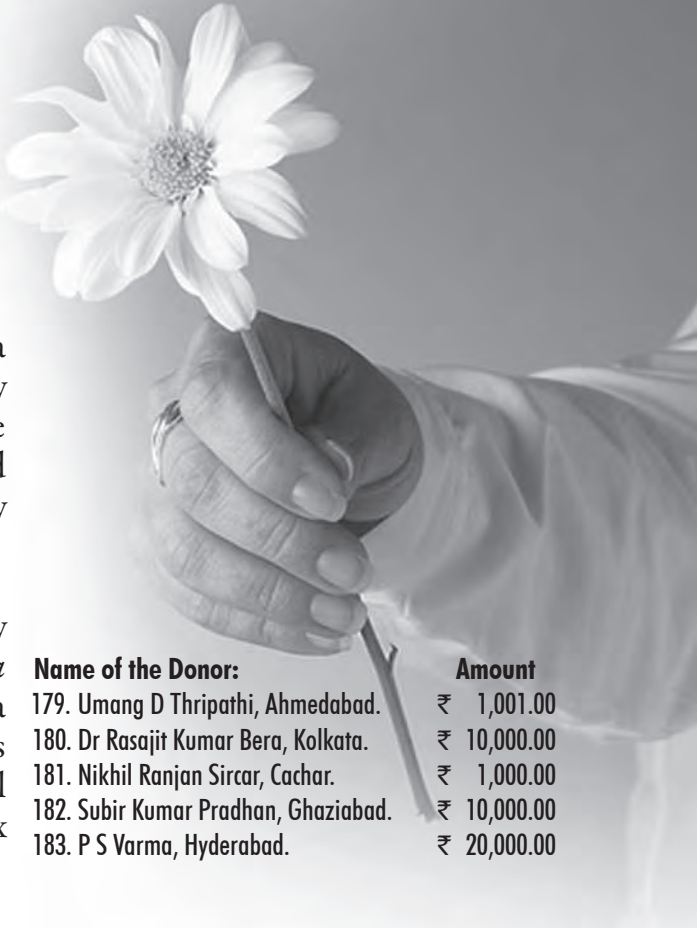
³ Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Convention 1980, 54.

In reverential homage:
Bani, Bhaskar, Debasree, Devajit Roy,
Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi 110 019

CONTRIBUTE TO THE PRABUDDHA BHARATA CORPUS FUND!

Contribute your mite to the Prabuddha Bharata Corpus Fund and actively participate in this venture to propagate Indian culture, values, philosophy, and spirituality. Could there be a better way to show your appreciation?

You can send your contributions by cheque or drafts favouring '*Prabuddha Bharata*' to 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700014, India or make your donations online at www.advaitaashrama.org. All donations are exempt from Income tax under section 80G.



Name of the Donor:

179. Umang D Thripathi, Ahmedabad.
180. Dr Rasajit Kumar Bera, Kolkata.
181. Nikhil Ranjan Sircar, Cachar.
182. Subir Kumar Pradhan, Ghaziabad.
183. P S Varma, Hyderabad.

Amount

₹ 1,001.00
₹ 10,000.00
₹ 1,000.00
₹ 10,000.00
₹ 20,000.00

Vivekananda as the Turning Point —A compilation



Today it is absolutely imperative for the country and the world to be informed about Vivekananda's life-giving ideas and contributions. In the last hundred years or more, a great change has come about in the way human beings understand the world and each other. It has been a phenomenon of global dimension, silently working on a subtle plane. If we track the source of this phenomenon, we shall be led to two names: Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

As the title of the book suggests, Vivekananda is presented here as a 'TURNING POINT' in the modern history.

Pages xvi + 668 | Price ₹ 250 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

In Praise of Swami Vivekananda

January 2013
Vol. 118, No. 1

तं देशिकेन्द्रं परमं पवित्रं विश्वस्य पालं मधुरं यतीन्द्रम् ।
हिताय नृणां नरमूर्तिमन्तं विवेक आनन्दमहं नमामि ॥

To that Teacher of teachers, supremely pure, guardian of the world, the sweet one, the prince of yogis, who took a human form for the good of humankind—to that Vivekananda I prostrate myself.

(Swami Ramakrishnananda)

मूर्तमहेश्वरमुज्ज्वलभास्करमिष्टममरनरवन्द्यम् ।
वन्दे वेदतनुमुज्झितगर्हितकाञ्चनकामिनीबन्धम् ॥

Salutations to my Ishta, Chosen Ideal, who is the embodiment of Maheshvara, resplendent like the sun, adored by the gods and humans; the embodiment of the Vedas, who has overcome the bondage of much-censured greed and lust.

कोटिभानुकरदीप्तसिंहमहोकटितटकौपीनवन्तम् ।
अभीरभीहुङ्कारनादितदिङ्मुखप्रचण्डताण्डवनृत्यम् ॥

A lion (among men) brilliant with the light of a million suns, who has nothing on but the (sannyasin's) loin-cloth, who is dancing the violent dance (of Shiva) reverberating the quarters with the impassioned cry of 'fear not', 'fear not'.

भुक्तिमुक्तिकृपाकटाक्षप्रेक्षणमघदलविदलनदक्षम् ।
बालचन्द्रधरमिन्दुवन्द्यमिह नौमि गुरुविवेकानन्दम् ॥

I bow down to my guru Vivekananda, whose mere glance is enough to impart both enjoyment and liberation, who tramples with ease the myriad sins, who is the veritable Shiva with the crescent moon on the head, and who is worshipped by Indu [Sharatchandra].

(Sharatchandra Chakravarty)

EDITORIAL

Swami Vivekananda and World Culture

A LITTLE MORE THAN seven billion people, though biologically one, are all so fascinatingly different. One of the factors that make for differentiation is culture. And what keeps people from exterminating each other is also culture. Although society offers scope for culture to take roots and grow, yet it is not defined by society. For the last few decades a universal culture is growing as nations and people bond at different levels. Many scholars call this a culture of humankind. For centuries saints, philosophers, and thinkers spoke and wrote about such a future human development. National, racial, and geographical cultures that were dominant for thousands of years are now becoming subcultures of the coming world culture.

In every society smaller subcultures operate within larger subcultures of specific groups with their own traditions and practices. These subcultures reach down to smaller and smaller groups till they include the family, and finally even the individual. For each individual is a cultural story. Such a wide-ranged wavelength of the cultural spectrum is the reason for many seemingly confusing and contradictory definitions of culture. The many meanings of the same word can be reconciled if we define culture as comprising of many levels. Culture can also be visualized as a spiral with the various large or small subcultures as the linking structures that support the arms. This cultural spiral can be likened to the DNA structure. Of course it is not so simplistic, but neither is the DNA.

Amidst the various levels or meanings it is clear that culture is the product of the human mind. This human faculty has enabled humans to become superior beings. The more humans evolve, the more they become cerebral. In the beginning, as humans struggled against their old habits to wander and build habitats in ideal environments, they faced many challenges. Humans responded to these challenges effectively because they were helped by a long nurturing childhood in which they learnt many things, especially from mothers. This was the beginning of culture, and the woman stood at its centre.

Humans ingeniously struggled and survived the environment. The second challenge was group living, which presented a formidable challenge for the individual. A person was torn between his or her self-interests and those of others. Those societies that placed themselves above individuals developed culture quickly. Social rules, principally of controlling one's impulses, and cultural norms came into being. The individual was a circle intersected by many other circles. The individual was culturally nourished and in turn contributed to culture. Individuality became a cultural construct. The third challenge was relating the individual or group to the vast earth and the skies outside. What was one's purpose, meaning, and destiny in an infinite existence? The more one could relate to the whole, the more one's mental horizon grew. The response was initially material, growing into moral, intellectual, and finally spiritual. This gave rise to concrete forms of religious culture.

Everything from language, dress, food, customs, traditions, behaviour, and so on is the result of culture. Culture impacts society—all institutions, architecture, systems, arts, laws, and so forth are also the result of culture. However, the religious subculture became powerful in shaping culture because it was the finest answer to one's place in the universe, besides promising immortality. Thus, religions built all the necessary paraphernalia for establishing themselves or, looking at it differently, all cultural practices gravitated towards this hub.

Old religions today are becoming sub-religions. Is a new religion rising to swallow the rest? No. Just as humans started developing culture and out of it grew religion, so also humanity is first consciously as well as unconsciously being impelled to build a universal culture. A universal religion too would then be a part of this universal culture. The power driving humanity into universality is the superior mind. The modern mind is growing exponentially, yet these are its first baby steps. In the olden days a limited world view regarding humanity and society had resulted in a limited view of culture and religion. As human knowledge grows, universal ideas of culture and religion also grow.

Human progress has been retarded whenever humans have been destructive. Whenever they creatively built things, without disturbing the previous layers, they have progressed. Being chastened, humans are now learning to build a universal culture without destroying the old structures. This universal culture will be a fulfilment of all previous stages, and yet it has to be broad enough for the future. In this fulfilment religion, science, arts, literature, poetry, and philosophy—all have to commingle and become fulfilled. There would be no 'your' or 'my' culture but 'our' culture.

One more major adjustment had to be made, and that came from the Divine. This fulfilment

had to be demonstrated, made into a doctrine, and lived. Next, the concept of God as immanent in creation had to be made central, had to be experienced. And all life and the world would be seen as reflecting divinity. This universal spiritual culture would gel with the progress towards universality that humans were reaching. It was not that these thoughts were absent in the past, they just were isolated, rare, and affecting only a few people. This world needed a reworking of some ancient ideas making them practical and applicable to all. This was, in brief, Swami Vivekananda's great mission. He himself was the prototype of the human that he was trying to build through his own efforts.

As there were three broad levels through which culture arose—individual, social, and cosmic—so also there were three levels in which God had to work in this age. That Divine, embodied as Sri Ramakrishna, worked on the individual level teaching us how to realize God and that all paths to God are valid. Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort, worked on the social level showing how to live a divine life in the midst of inevitable frictions. Swamiji had the task of building on these levels, giving it a final shape, as well as preach it to humanity in a modern idiom.

A question may arise as to why has this universal spiritual culture taken so long to appear? If Sri Ramakrishna is the avatara of the age, and Sri Sarada Devi is the Divine Mother herself in human form, they could have changed humanity in the blink of an eye. One plausible answer for the delay is that the Divine gave this message to humanity in advance of our times in order to prepare ourselves. Humankind would have to go through many struggles on the lower planes of cultures to know that the universe is one, not allegorically, poetically, intellectually, or emotionally but scientifically. That would be the basis for


building a new spirituality, and human contribution was necessary.

It must be remembered that it takes years for culture to form. And all these years were the slow preparation for humanity through wars and all other mistakes. This has another argument: Along with the wars and other maladies humankind has progressed remarkably faster in the last 175 years—since the birth of Sri Ramakrishna—so the Divine was applying the remedies slowly. Swamiji says: ‘One fact you must remember, that all the great teachers of the world have declared that they came not to destroy but to fulfil. Many times this has not been understood, and their forbearance has been thought to be an unworthy compromise with existing popular opinions. ... They knew how human society should grow, and patiently slowly, surely, went on applying their remedies, not by denouncing and frightening people, but by gently and kindly leading them upwards step by step.’

Though it seems a pretty long time for Swamiji’s work to impact humanity, the present worldwide celebrations of his 150th birth anniversary itself is a proof of Swamiji’s work. Sister Nivedita prophetically wrote on 11 April 1906 to Josephine MacLeod about the future of Swamiji’s impact: ‘I can see that the era of the world workers is quickly passing away, but I do think we ought to have a nucleus in Europe, before the movement of Ramakrishna settles down to the silent thought germination which must come. ... You see, when we who understood Swamiji, and remember Him are dead, there will come a long period of obscurity and silence, for the work that He did. It will *seem* to be forgotten, until, suddenly, in 150 or 200 years, it will be found to have transformed the West.’

Culture spirals out of the human mind. Individual minds, according to Indian philosophy, rise from the universal mind, which in turn rises from

the Atman. And the Atman is the same as Brahman. What about the DNA coded in a spiral structure? In Indian philosophy the universal mind gives rise to the subtle universal energy, which by combination and recombination becomes gross matter. This means that the entire spiral structure of culture, life, and the universe has come from the Reality, and it can be unerringly predicted that everything will spiral back into the Reality, for it is seen in the world that the source is also the place of dissolution. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* teaches: ‘Crave to know well that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman.’

All through history humankind has been developing culture in order to discover its origins, its place in the universe, and also the origins and end of the universe. It is unlikely that the old cultures, with their subcultures of religion, could comprehensively answer many of the modern doubts and questions, given the vaster dimension of life, mind, and universe we now know of. If a larger national culture that is superior and refined can absorb smaller subcultures, given time, without any conflict, then the many sub-religions would also be absorbed, without conflict, in the universal culture with a universal humanity. This coming of a universal culture that has its origins in the Reality and is moving towards the Reality has to be a spiritual culture in its progression. But humans as we are, we were fighting to save the old structures of religions and cultures and thereby arresting the dawn of the new world culture. This is one of the main reasons why this universal culture took so long in making its presence felt. Though we are not yet out of the woods, the way has been shown by Swami Vivekananda. More than seven billion people will begin the slow journey towards a universal spiritual culture. 

Psychological Ideas of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Nityasthananda

PSYCHOLOGY, AS IT IS GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD, is the study of the mind in its different aspects and functions. Psychologists arrive at certain conclusions and formulate theories of human psychology by studying the behaviour and conduct of human beings—abnormal, normal, and supranormal—under various circumstances. They also make a study of animal behaviour, and the conclusions drawn are applied to human beings. Today highly advanced neurology is making possible the objective study of many psychological factors. In the light of a number of scientific experiments and investigations, psychologists are entering into the hitherto unknown regions of the human psyche, revealing unforeseen factors affecting human behaviour and conduct. Armed with the most sophisticated scanning instruments neuroscientists, and those in related fields, are forging ahead into the vast uncharted territory of the human mind, unearthing amazing psychological factors that influence conscious thinking and behaviour.

Swami Vivekananda was not a professional psychologist, but with his rich experience of yoga, his dealing with different types of people the world over, his keen sense of observation, penetrative intelligence, and spiritual insight, some of his utterances, counsels, and guidance reveal the most modern psychological ideas.

Union of Subject and Object

Swamiji considered sage Kapila, the father of Sankhya philosophy, as the first and the greatest psychologist of the world. Sankhya is the world’s oldest philosophy. Speaking about him Swamiji says:



Swami Nityasthananda is an acharya at the Probationers’ Training Centre, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

The greatest psychologist the world has ever known, Bhagavan Kapila, demonstrated ages ago that human consciousness is one of the elements in the make-up of all the objects of our perception and conception, internal as well as external. Beginning with our bodies and going up to Ishvara, we may see that every object of our perception is this consciousness plus something else, whatever that may be; and this unavoidable mixture is what we ordinarily think of as reality.¹

This obviously implies that no theories or concepts regarding any branch of learning, no knowledge of any thing that we conceive of can claim absolute objectivity. Even the most scientific theories are not precluded from this subjective factor of our experience, and Albert Einstein himself confesses this through his following observation: 'Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. ... He will never be able to compare his picture [of the mechanism] with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison.'²

If we consider this from the standpoint of psychology, it implies that whatever pain or pleasure befalls us is the creation of the subjective mind with the help of some external stimulus. Normally, our tendency is to blame the external world or other persons and events for every painful experience. However, Swamiji says:

We have seen that it is the subjective world that rules the objective. Change the subject, the object is bound to change; purify yourself, and the world is bound to be purified. This one thing requires to be taught now more than ever before. We are becoming more and more

busy about our neighbours and less and less about ourselves. The world will change if we change; if we are pure, the world will become pure. The question is why I should see evil in others. I cannot see evil unless I be evil. I cannot be miserable unless I am weak. Things that used to make me miserable when I was a child, do not do so now.³

The union of subject and object, considered from the standpoint of philosophy, reveals a tremendous world view. The power that is manifested in a beautiful butterfly and in everything else in the world is the same power that is flowing in our consciousness.

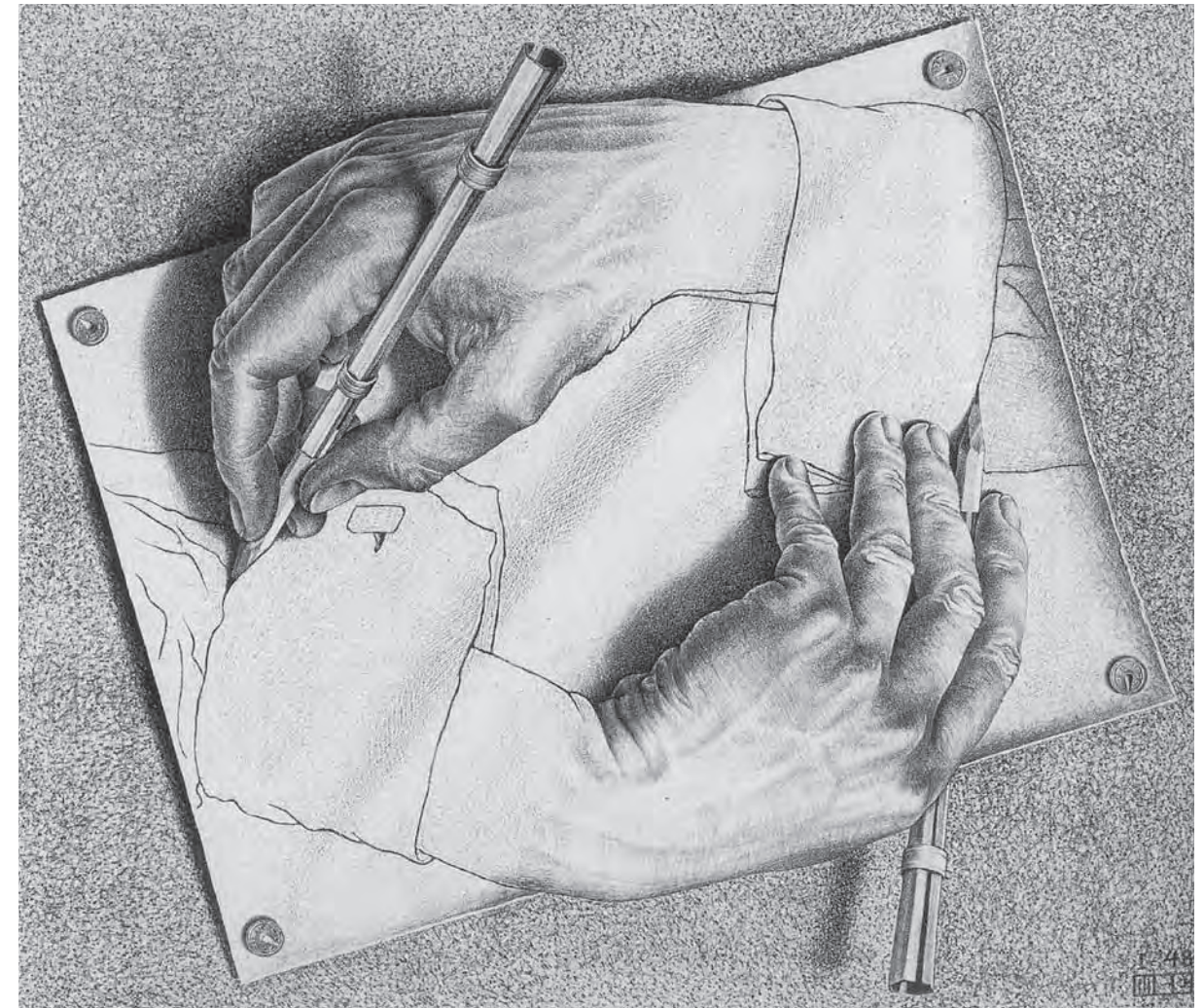
The Mind's Tendency to Project

During his wandering days in India, Swamiji stayed at Haripada Mitra's house in Belgaum. Haripada Mitra was not getting along with his superior and would lose his poise even at the slightest provocation. When he narrated his predicament Swamiji remarked:

Know it for certain that the ideas we entertain about others express themselves through our conduct; and even though we may not express these in words, people react accordingly. We see in the external world the same image that we carry in our hearts; nobody realizes how true the saying 'The world is good when I am good' is. From today try to get rid of the habit of finding fault with others, and you will find that, to the extent you succeed in this, the attitudes and reactions of others also change accordingly.⁴

This advice of Swamiji helped Haripada Mitra overcome his problem and, as he says, helped open a new chapter in his life.

Swamiji here was speaking of one of the important psychological phenomena called projection. Whatever we do not want to see in ourselves, we project it outside and see it in others; moreover, we become intolerant of



'Drawing Hands', by M C Escher, 1948

it. 'When some tendency in ourselves arouses guilt-feelings, we very commonly project it, and become inordinately critical in others of the impulse that we are trying to repress in ourselves. The man who is always complaining of other people's conflict, or snobbishness, or meanness, usually has a tendency towards these foibles himself.'⁵

According to Swamiji, we must follow 'the true Indian principle of looking subjectively for the cause of the objective.'⁶ It reminds us of the statement made by James Allen: 'A man is continually revolting against an *effect* without,

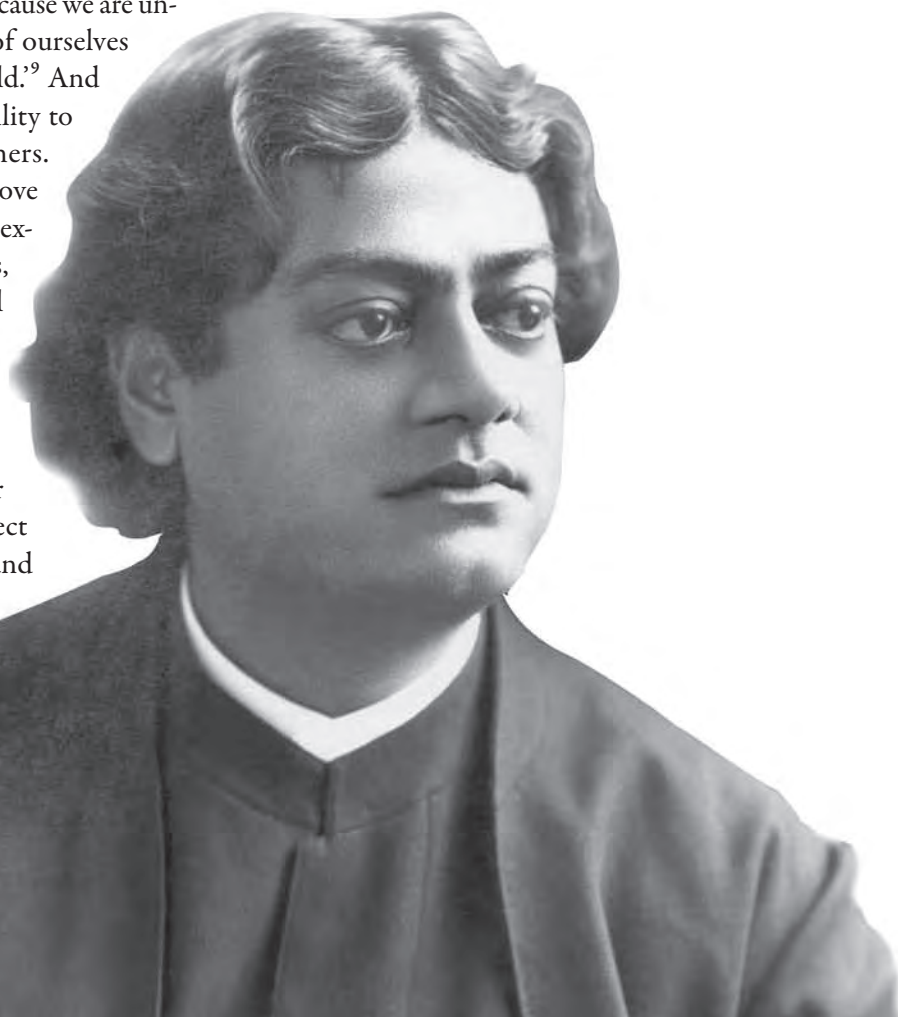
while all the time he is nourishing and preserving its *cause* in his heart.'⁷ Whenever something negative happens, we have to turn our attention inward and try to make corrections there, so that we will not be affected by the external factors. When we are bitten by a snake, we do not run chasing the snake to kill it; we rather pay attention to remove the poison without thinking of the snake.

This phenomenon of projection has another very important dimension. Whatever is projected comes back to us without fail, in some form or the other, at some time or the other,

and in some way or the other. When it comes back to us we may not realize that it is the result of our own projection, and we wonder why we have to suffer at all for no fault of ours. To quote Swamiji:

Every vicious thought will rebound, every thought of hatred which you may have thought, in a cave even, is stored up, and will one day come back to you with tremendous power in the form of some misery here. If you project hatred and jealousy, they will rebound on you with compound interest. No power can avert them; when once you have put them in motion, you will have to bear them. Remembering this will prevent you from doing wicked things.⁸

Echoing the same idea, the great transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber says: 'We feel the world hates us only because we are unaware of the small part of ourselves that gently hates the world.'⁹ And it also indicates our inability to express our love for others. Not only do we need the love of others, we also need to express our love for others, for our own personal growth. When we are able to do so, we do not feel that others hate us. When we fail to project our love and sympathy for others, naturally, we project our own shortcomings and see their reflections outside. Ken



Wilber continues: 'Our carping criticisms of other people are really nothing but unrecognized bits of autobiography' (191). He remarks: 'If you want to know what a person is really like, listen to what he says about other people' (ibid.). All these psychological factors reinforce Swamiji's emphasis on subjective change. To quote him again: 'The more we grow in love and virtue and holiness, the more we see love and virtue and holiness outside. All condemnation of others really condemns ourselves. Adjust the microcosm (which is in your power to do) and the macrocosm will adjust itself for you.'¹⁰

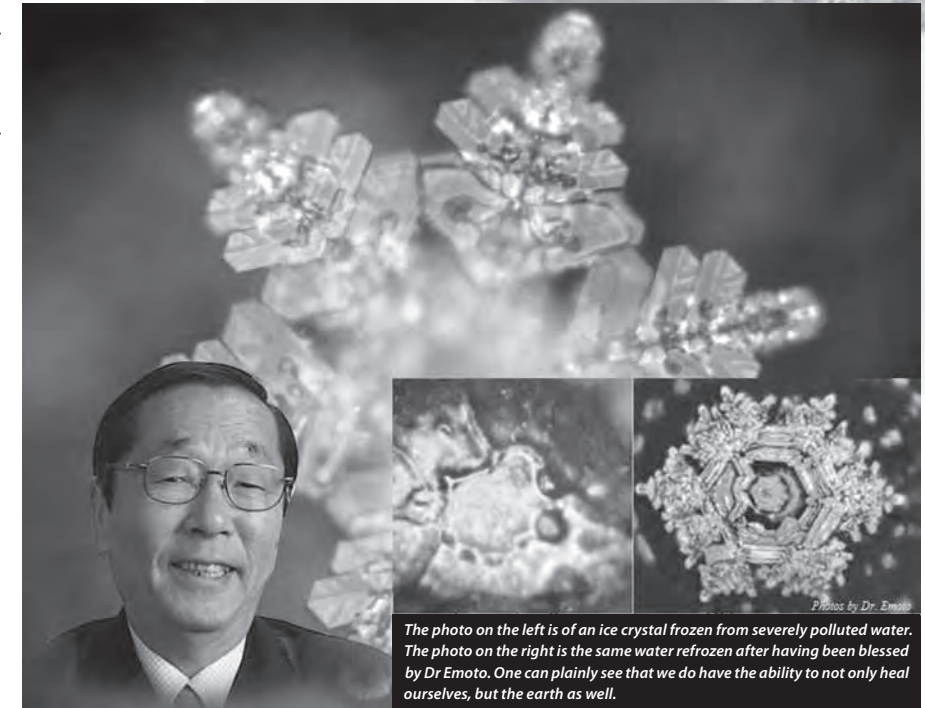
Mental Atmosphere

The harmful effect of negative thoughts was demonstrated by an experiment done in Japan:

The power of thought research was led by Dr Masaru Emoto in Japan. He got water from one source and divided it into two jars. Then he had a group of people focus thoughts of appreciation and gratitude on one jar, and thoughts of hate, anger, and despair on the other jar. He then froze the water from each jar, isolated ice crystals from each, and took photographs of them using high-speed photography. The difference between the water in the two jars was dramatic. The water crystals that had been exposed to the positive thoughts were beautifully, symmetrically shaped. The water crystals that had been exposed to anger were very ugly, distorted and [had] disturbing shapes. If you consider that 80 percent of our body is composed of water, you can see the importance of surrounding ourselves with positive thoughts as much as possible.¹¹

Another important psychological factor that Swamiji draws our attention to has a great practical bearing on our life. The atmosphere surrounding us consists of different kinds of thought vibrations, both good and bad, and according to our mental state, we tend to receive those vibrations and thereby we either become better or worse. Swamiji speaks of this in his own powerful language:

It is quite possible, therefore, that this



atmosphere of ours is full of such thought pulsations, both good and evil. Every thought projected from every brain goes on pulsating, as it were, until it meets a fit object that will receive it. Any mind which is open to receive some of these impulses will take them immediately. So, when a man is doing evil actions, he has brought his mind to a certain state of tension and all the waves which correspond to that state of tension, and which may be said to be already in the atmosphere, will struggle to enter into his mind. That is why an evil-doer generally goes on doing more and more evil. His actions become intensified. Such also will be the case with the doer of good; he will open himself to all the good waves that are in the atmosphere, and his good actions also will become intensified.¹²

Another important point we have to remember is that it is not that there are no persons who will inflict pain on us, or there are no adverse events that perturb us. But Swamiji's contention is that if we are strong enough within, external factors will not easily affect us. He gives us the example of the physical body that remains unaffected by the innumerable disease germs constantly surrounding it, as long as its immune system is sufficiently strong. Similarly, if our mental body is weak, there are hundreds and thousands of persons and events ever ready to destabilize us internally. We behave like puppets being played upon by external events. Swamiji's succinct remark on this point is very revealing: 'The man that has practised control over himself cannot be acted upon by anything outside; there is no more slavery for him. His mind has become free' (1.92). Here again Ken Wilber's observation is worth quoting: 'You will find that people and events don't cause you to be upset, but are merely the occasions for you to upset yourself.'¹³ Howard Cutler says: 'A tree with strong roots can withstand the most violent storm, but you cannot expect the tree to grow roots as the storm appears on the horizon.'¹⁴

Self-image

Swamiji insists on having a positive self-image, for our attitude towards the world and our relationship with others depend mainly upon our self-image. If one is suffering from an inferiority complex or a low self-image, one would imagine that others are not treating one properly, even though that is not the case. If others are laughing for some other reason, a person would assume that they are insulting him or her. Sometimes this kind of low self-image is formed due to circumstances. Swamiji says: 'Negative thoughts weaken men. Do you not find that where parents are constantly taxing

their sons to read and write, telling them they will never learn anything, and calling them fools and so forth, the latter do actually turn out to be so in many cases? If you speak kind words to boys and encourage them, they are bound to improve in time.'¹⁵

Having an inferior self-image is detrimental to one's individual growth. It acts as a great hindrance to our push to achieve success in any field in the midst of adverse circumstances. Even the slightest adversity is enough to deter one in any undertaking. For a person of low self-image and a defeatist mentality, even advantages may appear as adversities, love may be construed as hatred, medicine may act as poison, and amity may turn into enmity. The Roman philosopher Seneca's saying is very instructive: 'It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that things are difficult.'¹⁶

Here we can appreciate Swamiji's insistence on developing self-confidence, faith in oneself. He says: 'The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished.'¹⁷ He further says: 'To the man who has begun to hate himself the gate to degeneration has already opened; and the same is true of a nation. Our first duty is not to hate ourselves, because to advance we must have faith in ourselves first and then in God. He who has no faith in himself can never have faith in God' (1.38).

Self-hate is not only self-destructive, it also engenders the urge to destroy and injure and become aggressive when it is turned outwards. Self-hate induces self-punishment and self-condemnation, and also breeds jealousy among rivals and rebellion against authority. It is not possible to hate oneself and love others. Love of

others presupposes love of oneself. Dr Alexander Reid Martin says: 'Case after case shows a lack of self-love at the root of mental illness. If people had healthy love of themselves instead of carrying hidden burdens of self-contempt our psychiatric case load would be cut in half.'¹⁸

Self-love does not mean selfishness or self-centredness. Dr Felix affirms that when one has self-love, 'one has a feeling of dignity, of belonging, of worthwhileness, a feeling of adequacy—yet a healthy sense of humility' (ibid). That is why Swamiji emphasizes: 'The first step is joy of living. ... To laugh is better than to pray. Sing. Get rid of misery. Do not for heaven's sake infect others with it.'¹⁹ This joy of living is possible only when we love life, rather than hate it.

We cannot, however, claim that we are completely free from all weaknesses. When those who are sensitive are overpowered by weaknesses, they cannot escape from feelings of guilt. But this should not discourage us, slacken our enthusiasm, and make us downcast, for these will further debilitate us. It is worth quoting here the words of the great philosopher Baruch Spinoza:

One might perhaps expect gnawings of conscience and repentance to help to bring them on the right path, and might thereupon conclude (as everyone does conclude) that these affections are good things. Yet when we look at the matter closely, we shall find that not only are they not good, but on the contrary deleterious and evil passions. For it is manifest that we can always get along better by reason and love of truth than by worry of conscience and remorse. Harmful are these and evil, inasmuch as they form a particular kind of sadness. ... Just so we should endeavour ... to flee and shun these states of mind.²⁰


Swamiji's concepts of self-confidence, self-love, and joy of living are very relevant to the

ART: COLLAGE BASED ON 'WOMAN IN A HAT WITH POMPOMS AND A PRINTED BLOUSE', BY PABLO PICASSO, 1962

field of self-esteem psychology. Nathaniel Branden, a proponent of self-esteem psychology, writes in his famous book *Honoring the Self*: 'In human beings, joy in the mere fact of existing is a core meaning of healthy self-esteem. It is a state of one who is at war neither with self nor with others.'²¹ He further states, echoing Swamiji's thought as it were: 'High self-esteem can best be understood as the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect' (4).

We can trace the progressive development of Western psychology from the very crude and low image of a human to the noblest concept eloquently underscored by Swamiji. We find Sigmund Freud and his followers stating that repression of lower impulses is the cause of neurosis. Later Alfred Adler pointed out that it is the repression of the will to attain power that is the root cause of neurosis. Further, we find humanistic psychologists like Erich Fromm and others demonstrating that the main cause of neurosis is the repression of hidden talents and capacities. Still further we come across Victor E Frankl affirming that the repression of the will to attain meaning is at the root of all psychological problems. Finally, we come to Ken Wilber, who says: 'It is unfortunate that we in the West, over the past few centuries, have increasingly tended to repress the Transcendent. This repression extensive as it is subtle, is undoubtedly more responsible for the discontents of our present unhappy civilization than any amount of repression of sexuality, hostility, aggression or other superficial repressions operating on the upper levels of spectrum.'²²

In this regard we can fully appreciate Swamiji's emphasis on the manifestation of our inner divinity. It is the mind that needs to evolve and become pure. Otherwise, like a small cloud obscuring the massive sun, our Atman remains covered and deluded. Swamiji says: 'Manifest

the divinity within you, and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it.'²³ This is the most profound psycho-spiritual message of Swami Vivekananda. 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.42.
2. Quoted in Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu-Li Masters* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 35.
3. *Complete Works*, 1.426.
4. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 33.
5. Rex Night, *A Modern Introduction to Psychology* (London: University Tutorial, 1948), 197.
6. *Complete Works*, 8.472.
7. James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (London: Lulu, 2005), 21.
8. *Complete Works*, 1.262.
9. Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1993), 197.
10. *Complete Works*, 7.27-8.
11. Quoted in Joseph Law, *Living Greatness* (Sydney: New Holland, 2010), 76.
12. *Complete Works*, 1.82.
13. Ken Wilber, *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth* (Colorado: Shambhala, 1979), 101.
14. Quoted in *Living Greatness*, 49.
15. *Complete Works*, 7.170.
16. *1,600 Quotes & Pieces of Wisdom that Just Might Help You out when You're Stuck in a Moment (and Can't Get out of It!)*, comp. Gary P Guthrie (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2003), 117.
17. *Complete Works*, 2.301.
18. Quoted in Howard Whitman, 'Love Is Healing', *The Reader's Digest*, 57, 118.
19. *Complete Works*, 8.227.
20. Quoted in Willams James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Maryland: Arc Manor, 2008), 100-1.
21. Nathaniel Branden, *Honoring the Self* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 7.
22. *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth*, 123.
23. *Complete Works*, 4.351.

Vivekananda and the Clash of Thought

Linda Prugh

FROM SWAMPSCOTT, MASSACHUSETTS, on 26 July 1894 Vivekananda declared in a letter to the Hale sisters, Mary and Harriet: 'I am not going to leave this country without throwing one more apple of discord into this already roaring, fighting, kicking, mad whirlpool of American religion.'¹

This was just before he went to Greenacre in Eliot, Maine, to participate in a religious conference made up of all sorts of teachers, including one man who spoke under 'spirit control' and another who called himself a mental healer, and who Vivekananda referred to as a 'metaphysico-chemico-physico-religioso what not!' (6.260). Sitting beneath tall old pine trees, with a small group of students around him, the swami was able for the first time to teach both the philosophy and the practice of Vedanta. And he loved it. Greenacre was a great turning point for Vivekananda. Never again would he engage in a long series of lectures, riding the rails from town to town, as he had been doing after the Parliament of Religions in September 1893. In January of 1895 he established a headquarters in New York City, where he could work with students, classroom style.

Throughout his time in the West, he threw out seeds of new ideas, knowing that at least some would take hold in the hearts of those who were listening, and thus into American soil. Though the ideas he threw out seemed radical at the time, frightening away many, still some did take hold. One year later, at Thousand Island Park in upstate New York, he worked with a number of his students with the intent of making some yogis who would spread the message of Vedanta. One day he explained to them his own method for doing this. He said:



Linda Prugh is a long-time member and present secretary of Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri.

IMAGE: MOSAIC RECOVERED FROM POMPEII, ITALY, DEPICTING A BATTLE BETWEEN THE ARMIES OF ALEXANDER AND DARIUS / MUSEO ARCHAEOLOGICO, NAPLES

Fire a mass of bird-shot; one at least will strike; give a man a whole museum of truths, he will at once take what is suited to him. Past lives have moulded our tendencies; give to the taught in accordance with his tendency. Intellectual, mystical, devotional, practical—make one the basis, but teach the others with it. Intellect must be balanced with love, the mystical nature with reason, while practice must form part of every method. Take everyone where he stands and push him forward (7.98).

'A Voice without a Form'

Vivekananda loved to use the buckshot method. Josephine MacLeod once said: '[Swamiji] learned every day. He was different every day. Always fresh, throwing out new ideas.'² Sometimes the swami would use a slightly different technique: that of making statements or asking questions that seem to have been deliberately designed to inspire thought, discussion, and debate. And through it all, Vivekananda remained 'a voice without a form'. In a letter written from the US to his brother disciples he said:

Through the Lord's will, the desire for name and fame has not yet crept into my heart, and I dare say never will. I am an instrument, and He is the operator. Through this instrument He is rousing the religious instinct in thousands of hearts in this far-off country. Thousands of men and women here love and revere me. ... 'He makes the dumb eloquent and the lame cross mountains.' I am amazed at His grace. Which-ever town I visit, it is in an uproar. They have named me 'the cyclonic Hindu'. Remember, it is His will—I am a voice without a form (6.283).

What does 'a voice without a form' mean? There is evidence that illustrates on a gross level that Ramakrishna was behind Vivekananda's ideas. But I think it is easy to forget this. Vivekananda himself was such a genius in his own right, with a captivating personality and a blazing

intellect. His nearly flawless English impressed people, and he was also able to readily grasp the figurative American idiom—something that helped him in connecting with his audiences. Because he spoke their lingo, they felt he understood their hearts too.

Christine Greenstidel once reminisced about Vivekananda's lecturing. She wrote: 'When asked what preparation he made before speaking, he said none. But neither did he go *unprepared*. He told us that usually before a lecture he heard a voice saying it all. The next day he would repeat what he had heard. He did not say whose voice he heard. Whatever it was, it came as the expression of some great spiritual power, greater than his own normal power, released by the intensity of his concentration.'³

Sometimes, according to Vivekananda himself, when he had stayed in hotels or boarding houses, a fellow lodger would ask him: 'With whom, Swamiji, were you talking so loudly last night?'⁴ Later on in India Swami Shivananda once told some monks:

Swamiji started preaching the message of Vedanta in the West, and we received reports of his lectures here. At first we could hardly believe that these were lectures by Swamiji when we read them. He didn't use the language or the ideas we were familiar with. Everything became changed. He had a new message and a new language. Before going to America, in his conversations here, he had a leaning towards the path of knowledge, and his language was quite philosophical and scholarly. But in the lectures he gave in the West his language was simple and direct and his ideas were full of life and love. Returning to India, he remarked: 'Do you think I gave those lectures? It was the Master who spoke through me.'⁵

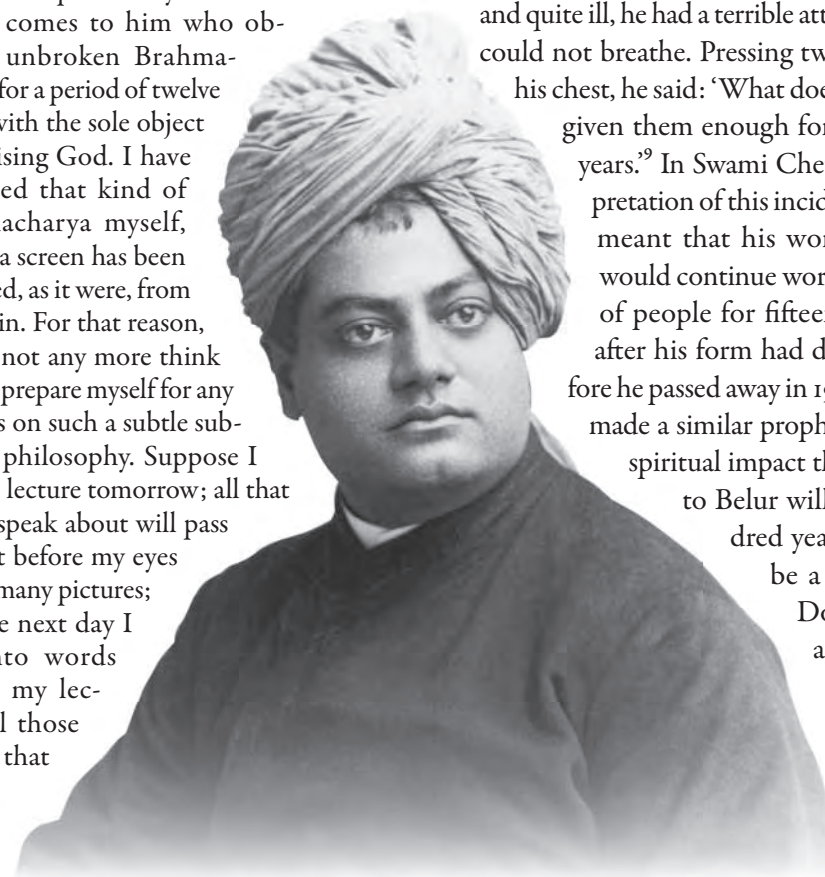
Were those who heard Vivekananda speaking from the platform able to detect that it was the Lord speaking through him? May Elizabeth

Stevenson—Sister Avabamia or Avavamia—heard Vivekananda speak, possibly in San Francisco in 1900. She was later initiated by Swami Abhedananda and beginning in 1908 lectured on Vedanta and opened Vedanta study centres in Australia and New Zealand. She wrote of her own experience of hearing Vivekananda: 'No matter how long he spoke, he was fresh after two hours of speaking as he was at the commencement of his lecture. To lose sight of the self and let God have the vocality at His merciful disposal is another secret which none knows but he who has the experience and has been taught by the Lord Himself.'⁶

The Voice behind the Voice

Vivekananda once explained to Priyanath Sinha:

Taking His name, if you set yourself to work, He will accomplish everything Himself through you. ... That power may come to all. That power comes to him who observes unbroken Brahmacharya for a period of twelve years, with the sole object of realising God. I have practised that kind of Brahmacharya myself, and so a screen has been removed, as it were, from my brain. For that reason, I need not any more think over or prepare myself for any lectures on such a subtle subject as philosophy. Suppose I have to lecture tomorrow; all that I shall speak about will pass tonight before my eyes like so many pictures; and the next day I put into words during my lecture all those things that I saw.⁷



Swami Chetanananda has pointed out something else that is vital to remember when we read Vivekananda's words. He wrote:

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the Master declared his identity: 'The other day I saw Satchidananda come out of this sheath (his body). It said, "I incarnate Myself in every age"'. On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna said to M, 'If you ever see me instructing you, then know that it is Satchidananda Himself that does so'. Sri Ramakrishna's ego had died forever. It was God Himself who worked and spoke through him. Thus we come to this conclusion—that Vivekananda's voice, Sri Ramakrishna's voice, and the voice of Brahman are one and the same. As Brahman is eternal and immortal, so is the voice, the message, of a knower of Brahman.'⁸

In 1901 when Vivekananda was in Shillong and quite ill, he had a terrible attack of asthma and could not breathe. Pressing two pillows against his chest, he said: 'What does it matter! I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years.'⁹ In Swami Chetanananda's interpretation of this incident, Vivekananda meant that his words, his message, would continue working in the minds of people for fifteen hundred years, after his form had disappeared.¹⁰ Before he passed away in 1902, Vivekananda made a similar prophetic remark: 'The spiritual impact that has come here to Belur will last fifteen hundred years—and this will be a great university. Do not think I imagine it. I see it.'¹¹

The point I want to emphasize is that it is really

Ramakrishna—his life, his experiences, his teachings—that has come to the West through Vivekananda and has taken roots that will deepen and spread in the coming decades. Vivekananda remarked that Ramakrishna was ‘a man whose whole life was a Parliament of Religions’¹², and the best commentary on the Upanishads. And Ramakrishna himself stated: ‘The spiritual experiences of this place (*meaning himself*) have surpassed even the Vedas and Vedanta.’¹³

And Vivekananda described that Vedanta and Ramakrishna taught this way:

All religions have for their object the teaching either of devotion, knowledge, or Yoga, in a concrete form. Now, the philosophy of Vedanta is the abstract science which embraces all these methods, and this it is that I teach, leaving each one to apply it to his own concrete form. I refer each individual to his own experiences, and where reference is made to books, the latter are procurable, and may be studied by each one for himself. Above all, I teach no authority proceeding from hidden beings speaking through visible agents, any more than I claim learning from hidden books or manuscripts. ... Truth stands on its own authority, and truth can bear the light of day. ...

I propound a philosophy which can serve as a basis to every possible religious system in the world, and my attitude towards all of them is one of extreme sympathy—my teaching is antagonistic to none. I direct my attention to the individual, to make him strong, to teach him that he himself is divine, and I call upon men to make themselves conscious of this divinity within. That is really the ideal—conscious or unconscious—of every religion.¹⁴

And that is the Vedanta—universal, non-sectarian, and full of freedom—that Vivekananda taught, and to which we are the joyful heirs! Marie Louise Burke wrote about this new kind of Vedanta:

Never before Swamiji’s time had the term [Vedanta] been given such universal significance as he gave it. Never before had it been broadened into a philosophy and religion which included every faith of the world and every noble effort of man—reconciling spirituality and material advancement, faith and reason, science and mysticism, work and contemplation, service to man and absorption in God. Never before had it been conceived as the one universal religion, by accepting the principles of which the follower of any or no creed could continue along his own path and at the same time be able to identify himself with every other creed and aspect of religion.¹⁵

That is the genius of Ramakrishna; that is the genius of Vivekananda! When he was in Madras in 1897, Vivekananda boldly proclaimed that the three schools of Vedanta—dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism—were not contradictory but complementary. Afterwards, he was asked why no one else had ever taught this before. He replied: ‘Because I was born for this, and it was left for me to do!’¹⁶

In the early 1900s, when Sri Aurobindo was imprisoned in Alipore jail, he had an experience of hearing Vivekananda speak to him for three weeks. Later Aurobindo wrote:

The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject. ... It was the spirit of Vivekananda which first gave me a clue in the direction of the supermind. This clue led me to see how Truth-Consciousness works in everything. ... Vivekananda came and gave me the knowledge of the intuitive mentality. I had not the least idea about it at that time. He too did not have it when he was in the body. He gave me detailed knowledge illustrating each point. The contact lasted about three weeks and then he withdrew.¹⁷



On 11 April 1906 the foresighted Sister Nivedita wrote to her friend Josephine MacLeod about the future of Vivekananda’s message:

I can see that the era of the world workers is quickly passing away, but I do think we ought to have a nucleus in Europe, before the movement of Ramakrishna settles down to the silent thought germination which must come. ... You see, when we who understood Swamiji, and remember Him are dead, there will come a long period of obscurity and silence, for the work that He did. It will *seem* to be forgotten, until, suddenly, in 150 or 200 years, it will be found to have transformed the West.¹⁸

And Vivekananda himself wrote from America to Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1894 pointing out some of the conditions that must exist in a strong religious order:

There are eyes that can see at a distance of fourteen thousand miles. It is quite true. Keep quiet now, everything will see the light in time, as far as He wills it. Not one word of His proves untrue. My brother, do men grieve over the fight of cats and dogs? So the jealousy, envy, and elbowing of common men should make no impression on your mind. For the last six months I have been saying the curtain is going up, the sun is rising. Yes, the curtain is lifting, by degrees, slow but sure; you will come to know it in time. *He* knows. One cannot speak out one’s mind. These are things not for writing. ... Never let go your hold of the rudder, grasp it firm. We are steering all right, no mistaking that, but landing on the other shore is only a question of time. That’s all. Can a leader be made, my brother? A leader is born. And it is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be *dasasya dasah*—a servant of servants, and must accommodate a thousand minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader. First, by birth, and secondly, unselfish—that’s a leader. Everything is going all right, everything will come round. He casts the net all right, and winds it up likewise. ... Ours is but to follow; love is the best instrument. Love conquers in the long run. It won’t do to become impatient—wait, wait—patience is bound to give success.¹⁹

Stirring up Minds

We alluded to the fact that Vivekananda would say things that seem to have been designed to stimulate thought, discussion, and debate. For example: When I read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, it always gives me a little jolt when I come to the 11 March 1885 entry and read a question that Narendra—the future Vivekananda—asks. Ramakrishna has just stated:

Shankara’s Non-dualistic explanation of Vedanta is true, and so is the Qualified Non-dualistic interpretation of Ramanuja.
Narendra: ‘What is Qualified Non-dualism?’

Master: 'It is the theory of Ramanuja. According to this theory, Brahman, or the Absolute, is qualified by the universe and its living beings. These three—Brahman, the world, and living beings—together constitute One. Take the instance of the bel-fruit. ... At first it appears that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit; the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to. Likewise, in spiritual discrimination one must first reason, following the method of 'Not this, not this': God is not the universe; God is not the living beings; Brahman alone is real and all else is unreal. Then one realizes, as with the bel-fruit, that the Reality from which we derive the notion of Brahman is the very Reality that evolves the idea of living beings and the universe. The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of one and the same Reality; therefore, according to Ramanuja, Brahman is qualified by the universe and the living beings.'²⁰

I said that this question of Narendra gives me a jolt. Why? Because it is 11 March 1885, and in less than eighteen months this young man will be the leader of a band of monastic brothers. Already he often leads the others in vigorous discussions on various spiritual topics involving philosophical ideas. The Master even sets up some of these verbal duals, and usually Narendra tears the other

person's arguments to shreds. His question shocks because Narendra has always been a genius in all his studies, and was a student of Scottish Church College where he studied under top professors. There he would have had the opportunity to study under Archibald Edward Gough, whose most important work was *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysics*, and who also translated *Review of Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy*, by Madhva.²¹ This would mean that Narendra would have known about the three schools of Vedanta: dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism.

So why did he ask that question? Perhaps there are some reasons. Since there were a number of Ramakrishna's disciples present during this exchange, perhaps Narendra wanted everyone present to hear Ramakrishna's explanation so that in the future they would all be on the same page. It was also important that they have Ramakrishna's interpretation as a background in the face of possible future opposition to his teachings. Narendra would also have known that the Master's interpretation of qualified non-dualism would have been superior to that of anyone else's and that he would explain it in clear, simple, memorable language. Maybe he simply wanted to deepen his own understanding of this important school of

Vedanta. For as long as he lived, Narendra's nature was that of a student, always ready to learn new things and gain new perspectives.

Another possibility is that Narendra simply wanted to stir up the thinking of the other devotees present. Opening up people's minds was really, one could say, his life's work, and this would be one of his methods of teaching. He would stir up the minds of others just to make them question and debate and dig for themselves. If anyone present felt that he understood this concept, Narendra's simply asking the question should have made him listen carefully to be sure. There is another example of what I consider his effort to stir up the minds of others: M recorded the following conversation that took place at Baranagore Math, on 17 February 1887:

Narendra and the other monastic brothers are living at the monastery. Haramohan and M have arrived. Shashi is busy with the Master's worship service. Narendra is about to go to the Ganges for his bath.

Narendra: 'Krishna mainly discussed japa and austerity in the Gita.'

M: 'How is that? Then why did he give so much advice to Arjuna?'

Narendra: 'Krishna did not ask Arjuna to perform family duties.'

M: 'When Krishna asked Arjuna to fight, Arjuna was a householder. He, therefore, was advising Arjuna to perform his family duties in a detached way.'²²

A little later:

Baburam: 'I don't understand the Gita and other scriptures. The Master said the right thing, "Renounce, renounce".'

Shashi: 'Do you know what the real import of the word "renounce" is? It means to remain in the world as an instrument in the hands of God' (212).

I believe that Vivekananda expressed this point of view about the focus of the Gita being japa and austerity because *he knew that it would not be the accepted view of his brother disciples and others present*. This may have been a deliberate attempt to simply stir up the minds of others who were present and inspire some original thought. Just see how animated the sattvic Mahendranath Gupta (M) becomes in this brief exchange, and how it stirs up more rebuttal and discussion in Baburam and Shashi.

Over the next several years Vivekananda was to make different statements about the central message of the Bhagavadgita. For example, in a conversation with Sharatchandra Chakravarty in 1897 he revelled in the fact that Sri Krishna was unattached to action, adding: 'As if He was the embodiment of knowledge, work, devotion, power of concentration, and everything.'²³ And in a class he gave at Alambazar Math in 1897, he stated: 'The reconciliation of the different paths of Dharma, and work without desire and attachment—these are the two special characteristics of the Gita' (4.107).

Vivekananda always stressed strength, fearlessness, and stupendous willpower. In his talks on the Gita at the Alambazar Math, he also



The battle between Bharat and Bahubali, pictured on a painted wooden book-cover (Patli), c.12th cent. / The Sarabhai Nawab Collection

declared: 'If one reads this one Shloka ... one gets all the merits of reading the entire Gita; for in this one Shloka lies imbedded the whole Message of the Gita' (4.110): 'Yield not to unmanliness, O son of Pritha! Ill doth it become thee. Cast off this mean faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of thine enemies' (4.108). And in May 1900 in San Francisco, he told his students: 'You may be the greatest philosopher but as long as you have the idea that you are the body, you are no better than the little worm crawling under your foot!'²⁴ This was Vivekananda, the world teacher. As he grew in spiritual power, so his penchant for mind-bending declarations grew in intensity. His closing message to those Gita students was: "Be brave! Be strong! Be fearless! Once you have taken up the spiritual life, fight as long as there is any life in you. ... Don't die with fright, *Die fighting*. Don't go down till you are *knocked down*." Then with his right arm extended, he thundered, "Die game! Die game! Die Game!" (6.218).

Later that same day, 17 February 1887, at Baranagore, the swami made another provocative remark that brought immediate sharp reactions from Rakhal and Mani. In this exchange perhaps the swami was trying to gauge the spiritual progress of other devotees. It also resulted in a reminder of Ramakrishna's own words on a crucial point in spiritual discipline:

Narendra: 'The vision of God is a kind of false perception.'

Rakhal: 'What do you mean? You have experienced it.'

Narendra (*with a smile*): 'One gets such a vision because of a derangement of the brain, like a hallucination.'

Mani: 'Brother, whatever you may say, the Master had visions of divine forms; so how can you say that it is a derangement of the brain? Do you remember when Shivanath remarked that the Master's samadhi was a kind of nervous

disorder or mental illness, and the Master replied, "Does anyone become unconscious thinking of Consciousness?"²⁵

Vivekananda is often accused of making contradictory statements. It seems possible that in at least some cases the swami made a provocative statement in a deliberate effort to stir up thinking and arouse debate and discussion, which would hopefully inspire others to do further research and reflection. Those statements make us think, trying to figure out what Vivekananda really meant and where he really stood. Once he said: 'It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought. Now, if we all thought alike, we would be like Egyptian mummies in a museum looking vacantly at one another's faces—no more than that!'²⁶

Vivekananda once declared: 'Rare are those who bring to the world new ideas on any subject.'²⁷ Vivekananda wanted his brother monks and devotees to develop original ideas, not just accept what the ancient sages and later interpreters had thought. Shortly before his *maha-samadhi*, he told his disciple Shuddhananda: 'You, my disciples, should try to discover the true import of these [Vedic] mantras and make original reflections and commentaries on the scriptures.'²⁸

Swamiji's Impact on the US

It is important to remember that Vivekananda was a great conciliator too. In a letter to Alasinga Perumal in 1894 he said: 'Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate.'²⁹ Another incident shows how he himself did this. One day there was a discussion at Belur Math on the idea of inauspicious stars—like *magha* and *ashlesha*—and times of the week, like the late hours of Thursday. Swami Shuddhananda said:

Shashi Maharaj implicitly believed and followed those ideas. But some of us did not care for them, considering them to be mere superstition. As a result, two groups formed in the monastery. Those who believed in inauspicious stars and times said: 'People who do not believe these things do not believe in Sri Ramakrishna, because the Master followed these customs.' Soon the issue of both parties reached Swamiji. Then he said: 'Yes, there is an effect of those customs, but the power of the Atman is infinite. The Atman's power can overcome those evil effects. Increase the power of the Atman, then none of those things will affect you.'³⁰

So here we are over a century later, honouring the Sesquicentenary of Vivekananda's birth, and our minds are still stirred up by his genius and power. Through the joyful feeling of his presence, he is still stirring our minds, giving us mental nudges to think for ourselves.

In conclusion, Philip Goldberg's *American Veda*, subtitled 'How Indian Spirituality Changed the West', was published in 2010.³¹ How wonderful it is that it has come out during the near-conjunction of the 175th anniversary of Ramakrishna's birth and the 150th birth anniversary of Vivekananda. Through extensive research the author has concluded that two aspects of Hinduism have taken a firm hold in American society: Vedanta and yoga. Referring to the statement in the Rig Veda 'Truth is one, sages call it by various names', Goldberg writes: 'Vedanta has so seeped into the collective awareness that the spirit of this premise, if not the literal phrase, is now widely accepted in the United States' (12).

American Veda includes a long chapter on Vivekananda, and the author frequently thereafter refers to how Vivekananda's teachings are being realized today. He also delineates the many fields of life where we can see Vedanta and yoga impacting thought and action: religion, education, science, medicine, psychology, the arts,

film, business, academia, and so many others. At the end of the chapter 'The Soul of Science, the Science of Soul' he writes: 'Mircea Eliade famously said that one side effect of science and technology was to "desacralize" the world. In recent decades, however, science has been *resacralizing* itself, with considerable help from the Vedic legacy. Vivekananda would no doubt be pleased by these developments. Over a century ago, he told a European audience, "In the light of Vedanta you will understand that all sciences are but manifestations of religion, and so is everything that exists in this world"' (308).

Twenty years ago I remember hearing a medical doctor laugh when a patient told him she practised yoga exercises. 'Yoga?' he asked, 'that's a waste of time.' And today many hospital systems in the United States offer yoga classes as therapy for general physical and mental fitness, and many health insurers cover hatha yoga as therapy. Goldberg points out that many who begin with the exercises of hatha yoga develop a desire to go deeper. Then they come to the philosophy of Vedanta, and this leads them to the *spiritual* yogas: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, and jnana yoga.

As a result, I see Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Vedanta everywhere. Even though few people I meet have heard the word Vedanta, the ideas are there. At meetings of the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, I see it expressed when someone shares their faith. My daughter recently completed her Master's in Individual and Family Therapy at Northwestern University. When she entered the programme, she called me all excited to say, 'Mom! The precepts we're learning are all Vedanta—though they don't call it that!'

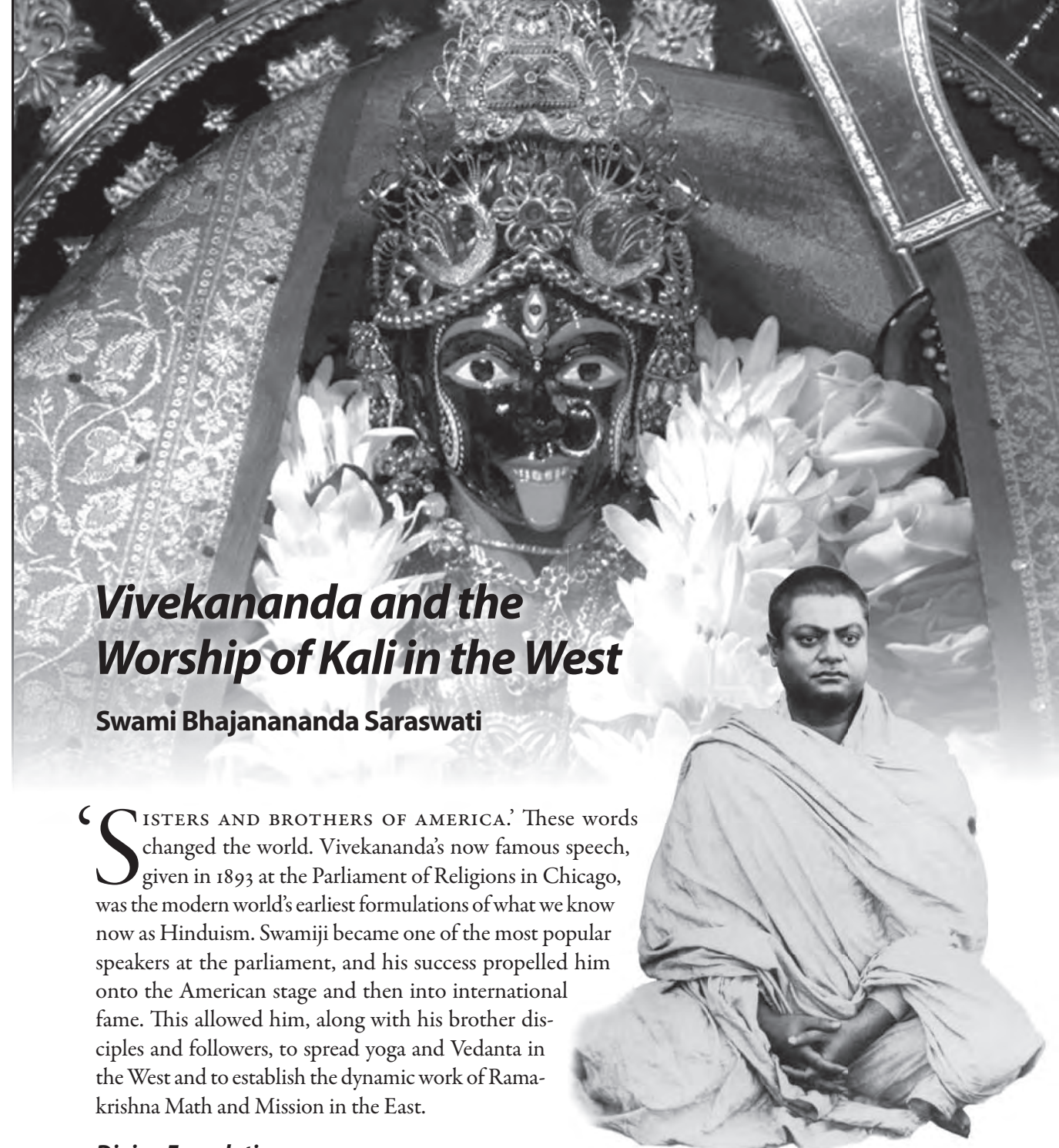
And constantly we remind ourselves that what is really being talked about here are the ideas of Ramakrishna—the experiences of Ramakrishna—through the voice of Vivekananda. He thrilled his audiences with the divine, eternal

message of the Great Master. How did that happen? And why do we thrill to his words today? Vivekananda gives us the clarion call and our hearts resonate. On 28 January 1900, in Pasadena, California, Vivekananda spoke on 'The Way to the Realisation of a Universal Religion'. In that talk he explained about the receiving of spiritual ideas: 'Not only must you have spiritual ideas, but they must come to you according to your own method. They must speak your own language, the language of your soul, and then alone they will satisfy you.'³² Josephine MacLeod was present at that lecture. She had first heard him speak five years earlier, on 29 January 1895, in New York, when he was first starting his classroom talks. In her reminiscences of that first day she recalled: 'He said something, the particular words of which I do not remember, but instantly to me that was truth, and the second sentence he spoke was truth, and the third sentence was truth. And I listened to him for seven years and whatever he uttered was to me truth. From that moment life had a different import. It was as if he made you realize that you were in eternity. It never altered.'³³

Truth never becomes old. It remains fresh forever. Vivekananda's words resonate because those truths he spoke are already within us! ❧

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 8.317.
2. Linda Prugh, *Josephine MacLeod and Vivekananda's Mission* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 1999), 452.
3. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 218-19.
4. *Complete Works*, 7.124.
5. Swami Chetanananda, 'I Am a Voice ...', *Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Youth Convention, 1985* (Howrah: Belur Math, 1985), 149-50.
6. Gopal Stavig, *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama 2010), 398.
7. *Complete Works*, 5.358.
8. 'I Am a Voice ...', 150.
9. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.590.
10. See 'I Am a Voice ...', 149.
11. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 243.
12. *Complete Works*, 3.315.
13. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 380.
14. *Complete Works*, 5.186-8.
15. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 2.384.
16. Sister Nivedita, 'The Master as I Saw Him', *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 5 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1.164.
17. *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 561.
18. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2 vols (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982), 2.800.
19. *Complete Works*, 6.284.
20. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 733-4.
21. See *Western Admirers of Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, 412.
22. Swami Chetanananda, *Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.)* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2011), 210.
23. *Complete Works*, 6.458.
24. *New Discoveries*, 6.212-3.
25. *Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.)*, 213.
26. *Complete Works*, 2.363.
27. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 762.
28. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1997), 70-1.
29. *Complete Works*, 5.37.
30. Swami Shuddhananda, 'Swamijir Prasanga', *Udbodhan*, 54/12 (Magh 1358-Paush 1359 BE), 649.
31. Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010).
32. *Complete Works*, 2.368.
33. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, 228.



Vivekananda and the Worship of Kali in the West

Swami Bhajananda Saraswati

'SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF AMERICA.' These words changed the world. Vivekananda's now famous speech, given in 1893 at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, was the modern world's earliest formulations of what we know now as Hinduism. Swamiji became one of the most popular speakers at the parliament, and his success propelled him onto the American stage and then into international fame. This allowed him, along with his brother disciples and followers, to spread yoga and Vedanta in the West and to establish the dynamic work of Ramakrishna Math and Mission in the East.

Divine Foundation

But the story does not truly begin with Swamiji's stirring words at the parliament. It does not even begin with the life of Vivekananda. The story begins with the heart of the Divine Mother responding to the crying need of the age. The story begins with Sri Ramakrishna.

Swami Bhajananda Saraswati is a resident monk and main pujari at the Kali Mandir, Laguna Beach, California.

Sprung from the direct experience of ancient sages, Indian culture had always been rooted in spiritual truth, which pervaded daily life. Invasion after invasion by foreign looters had cost India much, but its spiritual core remained strong, its eternal foundations resilient and adaptable to the ever-changing details of history. However, when the Europeans arrived in India, they quickly realized that in order to gain control of her wealth, they had to conquer her heart and soul as well. Many lands across the globe had fallen to European colonists, not only because of military strength but because of the introduction of European diseases such as small pox and plague, to which the local populations had no hereditary

resistance. In such weakened conditions, conquest became comparatively easy. In the case of India, what was the disease that weakened society, making it possible for a handful of Europeans to control about two hundred million people? It was a materialistic world view that values wealth above people, and people above God.

At the time of Sri Ramakrishna's advent India's ancient system of education and training was disappearing. The youth brought up in an occupied land began to identify with their occupiers and to doubt the religion and traditions that, to them, had led to such subjugation. They began imitating the West and saw India's religious traditions as obstacles to their entering

Kali Mandir, Laguna Beach, California



the modern world. But all attempts to revitalize India by destroying the traditions that had sustained her were bound to fail. Swami Saradananda asks: 'How can India, whose soul is religion, survive if her religion is not restored to life? How is it possible for the atheistic West to eradicate the religious degradation that resulted from its own materialism?'¹

We read in the Bhagavadgita that the blessed Lord incarnates in every age, when there is a decline in dharma, for the protection of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked. Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna recognize in him the latest incarnation, who came to restore the soul of India in her darkest hour, to restore her ancient dignity and spiritually uplift the world.

Born in 1836, the very year that the British system of education was adopted in India, Sri Ramakrishna grew up in an orthodox brahmana family in the village of Kamarpukur. Although only some sixty miles from the urban centre of Calcutta, the seat of English colonial power, Kamarpukur was not influenced by Western culture and thought. In 1852 Sri Ramakrishna moved to Calcutta, joining his older brother Ramkumar. This move was not only across space, but also across time, for with this move Sri Ramakrishna encountered the nineteenth century. Two years later he accepted to officiate as pujari, performer of puja, at Rani Rasmani's newly-built Kali temple in Dakshineswar, which would become the stage of his unprecedented sadhanas and realizations. As Kali's priest he began to ask himself if the goddess he was sincerely serving was real or not. If she was real, could one experience her directly? His intense longing for the vision of Mother Kali became so great, so overwhelming, that the Mother could not keep herself hidden from him any longer. The Master related his first vision of Kali to his close disciples: 'I had a marvellous vision of the

Mother and fell down unconscious. ... Within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss that I had never before experienced, and I felt the immediate presence of the Divine Mother' (212).

Even after this beatific vision Sri Ramakrishna was not satisfied and longed to have unbroken communion with her, sometimes rolling on the ground crying, 'Mother, be gracious unto me! Reveal Yourself to me!' (213). The Master later recounted: 'Sometimes I would lose outer consciousness from that unbearable agony. Immediately after that I would see the Mother's luminous form bestowing boons and fearlessness! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways' (ibid.).

The Divine Mother also sent him teachers to initiate him into the complicated practices of tantra, the difficult abstractions of Vedanta, the varied devotional moods of Vaishnavism, and even the 'foreign' faiths of Islam and Christianity. Each he practised with full sincerity. And the goal presented in each opened up to him as direct experience. In the heart of every tradition he saw his Mother Kali shining. Sri Ramakrishna's famous declaration '*yato mat, tato path*; as many faiths, so many paths' was not the result of intellectual comparison or of a modern open-mindedness. It came from his own realization, a gift of Goddess Kali to the world.

The Master realized that his liberal view was singularly unique. He came to understand that the Divine Mother was working through his body and mind. She is the reality that Sri Ramakrishna incarnated. It was her message that Sri Ramakrishna revealed.

Vivekananda and Kali

Mother Kali was Sri Ramakrishna's overwhelming reality. He sang to her, had visions of her, spoke intimately to her, and heard her voice. It was only by accepting Mother Kali that Swamiji

could fully accept Sri Ramakrishna and become his pure instrument. The Master had already seen Narendra's future in a vision. He understood that it was Narendra who would lead his disciples and devotees to accomplish the Mother's mission in the world. But the young Narendra, like much of young Bengal, had been swayed by the persuasive teachings of Keshabchandra Sen and the Brahmo Samaj. The Samaj and the other socio-religious groups of the day, responded to the challenge of the West, not with atheism, but with a 'Christianized' form of Hinduism. In their attempt to purify Hinduism of what they saw as superstition, they preached that the various deities were false, and its members even signed loyalty oaths vowing not to bow down before images. Thus, Narendra's close association with Sri Ramakrishna created a great dilemma for him, for he had

witnessed the Master's power, purity, and devotion, but could not accept the Hindu world that the Master lived in: a world of gods and goddesses, of 'graven' images, of visions and ecstasies. Swamiji later said of this time: 'How I used to hate Kali! ... and all Her ways!'

That was the ground of my six years' fight—that I would not accept Her. ... I loved him [Sri Ramakrishna], you see, and that was what held me. I saw his marvellous purity. ... I

felt his wonderful love. ... His greatness had not dawned on me then. All that came afterwards when I had given in. At that time I thought him a brain-sick baby, always seeing visions and the rest. I hated it. And then I too had to accept Her!'²

Like many major breakthroughs in life, Swamiji's 'accepting' Kali came as the result of a personal crisis. With the death of Narendra's father, his once affluent household was thrown into deep poverty. The young Narendra, although employable and qualified, could not secure any work to relieve his family's suffering. He reached the point of despair. Perhaps all this was the arrangement of the Divine Mother, for in times of great need she manifests. The Swami recounts:

It occurred to me that God grants the Master's prayers, so I should ask him to pray on my behalf that my family's financial crises would be overcome. I was sure that he wouldn't refuse, for my sake. I rushed to Dakshineswar and importuned him, saying, 'Sir, you must speak to the Divine Mother so that my family's financial problems can be solved.' The Master replied: 'I can't make such demands. Why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself. You don't accept the Mother—that is why you have all these troubles.' I replied: 'I don't know the Mother. Please tell the Mother for me. You have to, or I won't let you go.' The Master said affectionately: 'My boy, I've prayed many times to the Mother to remove your suffering. But She doesn't listen to my prayers because you don't care for Her. All right, today is Tuesday, a day especially sacred to Mother. Go to the temple tonight and pray. Mother will grant whatever you ask for, I promise you that. My Mother is the embodiment of Pure Consciousness, the Power of Brahman, and She has produced this universe by mere will. What can She not do, if She wishes?'

When the Master said that, I was fully convinced that all my suffering would cease as soon as I prayed to Her. I waited impatiently for night. At 9.00 p.m. the Master told me to

go to the temple. On my way, I was possessed by a kind of drunkenness and began to stagger. I firmly believed that I would see the Mother and hear Her voice. I forgot everything else and became absorbed in that thought alone. When I entered the temple, I saw that the Mother was actually conscious and living, the fountainhead of infinite love and beauty. Overwhelmed with love and devotion, I bowed down to Her again and again, praying, 'Mother—grant me discrimination, grant me detachment, grant me divine knowledge and devotion, grant that I may see You without obstruction, always!' My heart was filled with peace. The universe disappeared from my mind and the Mother alone occupied it completely.³

Two more times Sri Ramakrishna sent him back to the temple, and all three times Swamiji forgot to ask for his family's financial relief. The Master then granted that his family would not lack plain food and clothing. On Swamiji's request, that very night the Master taught him a song, which Swamiji sang until dawn:

Mother, Thou art our sole Redeemer,
Thou the support of the three gunas,
Higher than the most high.
Thou art compassionate, I know,
Who takest away our bitter grief.
Thou art in earth, in water Thou;
Thou liest as the root of all.
In me, in every creature,
Thou hast Thy home;
though clothed with form,
Yet art Thou formless Reality.
Sandhya art Thou, and Gayatri;
Thou dost sustain this universe.
Mother, the Help art Thou
Of those who have no help but Thee,
O Eternal Beloved of Shiva! (844).

The Master was so happy that he kept telling people over and over again: 'Narendra has accepted the Mother Kali. That's very good, isn't it?' (Ibid.).

During the years of his training, Narendra kept asking Sri Ramakrishna for an experience of *nirvikalpa* samadhi, the complete absorption of the self in the Divine. The moment came at Kashipur, during the Master's final illness. Sri Ramakrishna was lying awake in his bed while Narendra was downstairs in another room absorbed in deep meditation. He felt as if a lamp was burning at the back of his head when his sense of individual existence drowned in the bliss of pure Being. When he regained normal consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna told him: 'Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this revelation will remain under lock and key, and I will keep the key. When you have accomplished the Mother's work you will find the treasure again.'⁴

Even the realization of the non-dual Brahman comes as a gift from the Divine Mother.

'Mother's Work'

Vivekananda did not often mention Sri Ramakrishna in his public talks in the West. Even less did he reveal the centrality of Mother Kali in his life and thought. He focused, instead, on the message of the Master by presenting the broad underlying principles of religion, lecturing on the Upanishads, and preaching 'what is good for universal humanity'.⁵

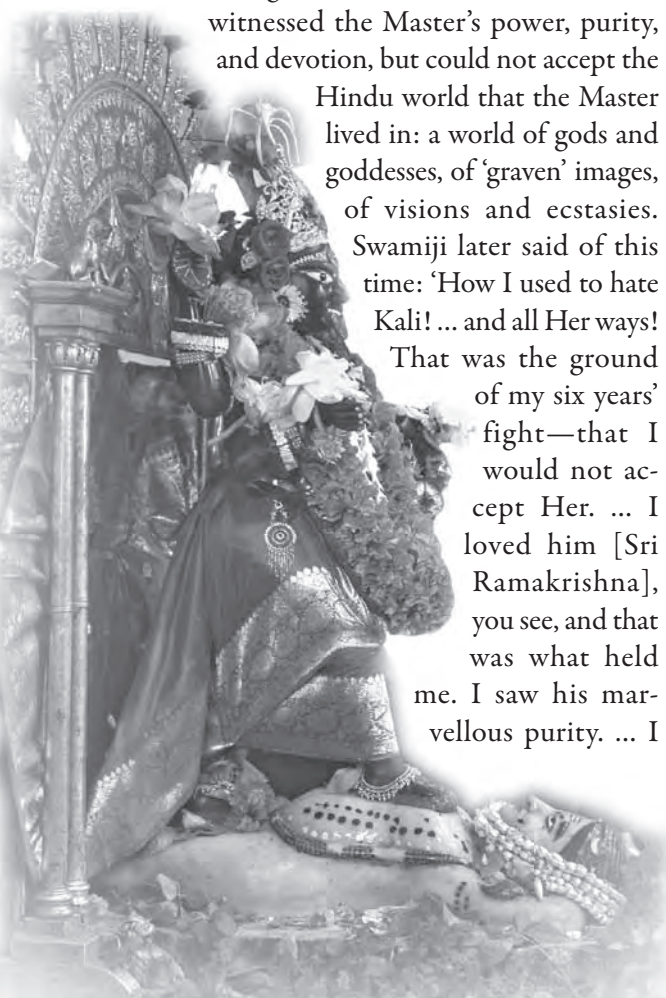


Image of Kali at
Dakshineswar temple

Though not openly preached, the swami could not keep his love for the Divine Mother hidden from his intimate disciples. 'You see,' he once said, 'I cannot but believe that there is somewhere a great Power that thinks of Herself as feminine, and called Kali, and Mother.'⁶ Upon his return to India, he started the yearly observance of Durga Puja and Kali Puja at Belur Math, along with the daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna.

Swamiji did, in fact, on occasions speak about the Mother:

Mother is the first manifestation of power and is considered a higher idea than father. With the name of Mother comes the idea of Shakti, Divine Energy and Omnipotence, just as the baby believes its mother to be all-powerful, able to do anything. The Divine Mother is the Kundalini ('coiled up' power) sleeping in us; without worshipping Her we can never know ourselves. All-merciful, all-powerful, omnipresent are attributes of the Divine Mother. She is the sum total of the energy in the universe. Every manifestation of power in the universe is 'Mother'. She is life, She is intelligence, She is Love. She is in the universe yet separate from it. She is a person, and can be seen and known (as Sri Ramakrishna saw and knew Her). Established in the idea of Mother, we can do anything. She quickly answers prayers.

She can show Herself to us in any form at any moment. Divine Mother can have form (Rupa) and name (Nama) or name without form; and as we worship Her in these various aspects we can rise to pure Being, having neither form nor name.⁷

Just as Sri Ramakrishna incarnated at a time when Indian culture was being threatened by materialism, so also Swamiji arrived in the United States at a cusp in Western culture, when simple religious beliefs were being undermined by the scientific method, the evolution theory of Charles Darwin, and the industrial revolution.



The doctrines of the Church no longer satisfied the educated classes, who became Swamiji's audience. To them he spoke his Master's liberal and

liberating message: that God not only exists but can be realized as a personal fact; that the religions of the world, including Christianity, are paths leading the sincere to this ultimate goal; that the truths of the Upanishads and methodologies of yoga were not antagonistic to rational enquiry or scientific scrutiny.

As we celebrate Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary, we look up to his legacy. In India he is a national hero, the prophet of the modern Hindu renaissance. We can see practically the transformative influence he has had on his motherland by inspiring generations of his monastic and lay followers to spread education, empower women, uplift the poor, serve the distressed, and distribute spiritual knowledge—all in the name of Sri Ramakrishna, the avatar of the age. But what is his enduring legacy outside of India?

As the first Hindu sannyasin to preach in America, Swamiji prepared the stage for today's interest in yoga, meditation, ayurveda, kirtan, and the many Hindu-based religious movements that are thriving. But we also see the more subtle effect of Swamiji's work, the effect he has had on the intellectual and spiritual culture of the world. Sri Ramakrishna's realization: 'As many faiths, so many paths' was first presented to the West by Swamiji during his opening address at the Parliament of Religions: 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O

Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee' (1.4).

This once revolutionary idea is now widely accepted, even by many Christians. Although 'Vivekananda' is not a household name, his influence has acted as a leavening agent, fundamentally lifting the world view of millions.

Kali in the West

While in India this universal message has never been separated from the person of Sri Ramakrishna, in the West, we are only beginning to recognize the person behind the principles, the giver of the gift. As Saradananda writes in his masterpiece *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*:

Kali Puja at Vedanta Society of Southern California



Will people come on their own to accept the Divine Mother's liberal message 'As many faiths, so many paths,' or will they accept it through that person who became the instrument of the Mother and brought that message

to the world? The answer to this question, as we understand it, must be determined by the questioner after seeing the result of the full realization of this doctrine either within themselves or in others. Until that realization dawns, silence is the best answer. But if the reader asks what we believe, we say that along with an authentic experience of this liberal attitude, one must have a vision of that person whom the Divine Mother, for the first time, sent to embody that doctrine for the good of the world. And one must pour out heartfelt love and respect for him who was free from ego and delusion. The Master will not demand this; no one else will prompt it; love for the Divine Mother will drive one to it spontaneously.⁸

Swamiji arrived in America in 1893. Within seven short years he established a network of societies to promote the teachings of Vedanta. Since then, these have spread to hundreds of centres, ashramas, monasteries, convents, study groups, and home shrines—all dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna.

Swamiji once told Sister Nivedita: ‘The future, you say, will call Ramakrishna Paramahansa an Incarnation of Kali? Yes, I think there’s no doubt that She worked up the body of Ramakrishna for Her own ends.’⁹ When you love someone, you want to love what they love, who they love. Sri Ramakrishna and Mother Kali cannot be separated.

Though it has been 120 years since Swamiji first addressed his American sisters and brothers, Mother’s work in America is just beginning. She must have a special plan, for she not only sent Vivekananda, but also other companions of the avatara, such as Swamis Saradananda, Turiyananda, Abhedananda, and Trigunatitananda—all great saints and knowers of God.

As far as we know, the first traditional worship of Kali in America was performed in the 1940s by Swami Prabhavananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, at Vedanta Society in Hollywood, California. Initially only very close devotees of the society were allowed to attend,

for fear of upsetting the puritanical sentiments of their neighbours, or of provoking the cultural biases and prejudices of even some of their own members. But over the years the annual all-night Kali Puja has become more and more popular, a highlight in the devotional lives of both Indian and Western devotees.

Another example of Swamiji’s legacy is Kali Mandir in Laguna Beach, California. In 1993 Elizabeth Usha Harding, author of *Kali, the Black Goddess of Dakshineswar*, arranged for a beautiful Kali image to be brought from India, which was ritually awakened by Haradhan Chakraborti, the late main priest of the Dakshineswar Kali temple. He named her *Sri Ma Dakshineswari Kali* and explained that because the image was now ‘alive,’ she needed to be worshipped every day. And Mother arranged for her worship, as devotees who had very little background in the intricacies of India’s temple puja standards now found themselves gradually adopting this vastly rich devotional tradition one detail at a time—out of a simple love and desire to please Mother. Haradhanji and his assistant Pranab Ghosal came annually for seventeen years, teaching the devotees Kali puja as practised in Dakshineswar since the time of Sri Ramakrishna.

There was never an intention to start a temple or establish a monastery. Over time this simple daily worship grew organically and slowly took on the form of a fully-functioning Hindu temple, where devotees, young and old, Western and Indian, householder and renunciant, can pour forth their hearts’ yearning to the Great Mystery at the centre of existence.

Sri Ramakrishna’s life and teachings point unequivocally towards spiritual freedom. It is not birth, not upbringing, not culture that decides your path. It is yearning. With yearning for the Divine, it does not matter what path you walk; and without yearning, you will not be able

Kali Puja at Vedanta Society of Southern California



ART: COLLAGE OF BENGAL AND ODISHA PATACHITRA PAINTINGS





to walk any path. Sri Ramakrishna reveals the purest and safest approach to an often misunderstood goddess. There are many ways of worshipping Kali. While many may be authentic, not all are safe. Sri Ramakrishna mastered the sixty-four branches of tantra—many difficult and controversial. But when the time came to train his own disciples, he made the path to God simple and beautiful. He said: ‘Pray to the Divine Mother with a longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment to “woman and gold”. It happens instantly if you think of Her as your own mother. She is by no means a godmother. She is your own mother.’¹⁰

When Swamiji was in Kashmir, he performed severe austerities. After many nights of intense sadhana at Kshir Bhavani, he had the vision of Mother. Returning to the houseboat that he and his companions were renting, he raised his hands in benediction and placed the marigolds that he had offered to the goddess on the heads of all of the disciples saying, ‘No more “Hari Om!” It is all “Mother” now! ... I am only a little child!’¹¹

Today, 150 years after his birth, we are still calculating the tremendous impact this ‘little child’ has had on the world. Sri Ramakrishna held the key to the Mother’s treasure, and Swami

Vivekananda, in his brief, blazing life of service, accomplished her work, without a doubt. But Mother’s great miracle is that he then left the key for anyone of us to find, if we but surrender to her. ‘This attitude of regarding God as Mother,’ Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘is the last word in sadhana. “O God, Thou art my Mother and I am Thy child”—this is the last word in spirituality.’¹²

References

1. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 80.
2. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 2005), 139–40.
3. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 842–3.
4. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 72.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 523.
6. *The Master as I Saw Him*, 140–1.
7. *Complete Works*, 7.26–7.
8. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 652.
9. *The Master as I Saw Him*, 140.
10. *Gospel*, 629.
11. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.381–2.
12. *Gospel*, 701.

Some Aspects of Vivekananda Literature

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

THE FIRST THING THAT STRIKES even a casual reader of Vivekananda literature is that one can enjoy the compelling excellence of language—even without interest or acceptance of the philosophical and religious insights. What the swami himself said comes to mind: ‘When you begin to study the arts and institutions of India, you become magnetized, fascinated. You cannot get away.’¹ Yes, you cannot get away from the magnetism of Swamiji’s life and thought. Moreover, the incredible clarity in explaining complex philosophy or laying down blueprints for social and economic regeneration, or the immensely pragmatic educational agendas—to name a few—are aspects that strike us transparently. The serene, sonorous language, invariably musical in its lilt and rhythm made Romain Rolland describe it as comparable to Beethoven’s symphonies.

The secret of this is made evident by Vivekananda himself: ‘I want to give them dry, hard, reason, softened in the sweetest syrup of love and made spicy with intense work, and cooked in the kitchen of Yoga so that even a baby can easily digest it’ (5.104). The unitive functions of the Yogas can hardly be better identified than this. We may think that Swamiji has taken recourse to metaphorical language and therefore he is fond of poetic language. True, Swamiji himself mentions ‘poetic’ language in his description of what he aimed at doing: his ‘life’s work’. ‘To put Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which is easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it’ (5.104). He adds, referring specially to Advaita Vedanta: ‘The

A respected littérateur in English and Telugu, Dr M Sivaramkrishna is a former head of the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Vivekananda

dry Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life, out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms, and out of bewildering Yogi-sm must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and, all these must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That's my life's work' (5.104–5).

The most significant word in the above passage is 'poetic'. It is not a random or loosely rhetorical word. No wonder an anonymous but

remarkably intuitive and learned lecturer remarked: 'Another aspect of his genius ... is his poetic gift—I refer to those wonderfully imaginative passages, those magnificent poetic outbursts that adorn his speeches and writings. His was a poet's soul, which perceived hints of beauty and divinity where the ordinary man perceives nothing, and revealed them to the world in language clothed with beauty as well as grace.'² Swamiji himself once exclaimed to a disciple: 'Don't you see, I am, above all, a poet!' (Ibid.).

What kind of a poet is Swamiji? Is poetry only a vehicle of personal emotions, social activism, and the like? Or is poetry invariably sensuous? In short, can we put together an integrated map of what we find in the enormous quantum of Swamiji's *Complete Works*? And, see it if possible, as a unique contribution to our contemporary theories and practices of literature?

The striking overall impression we get of his protean variety is that as a person he was a born leader, a nature-groomed teacher, and an orator who raised the potentialities of English language to hitherto unknown 'peaks of human eloquence'. English was not the 'other tongue' but one that he handled as his 'mother-tongue'! A monk, a mystic, a yogi, a scintillating conversationalist, a prodigious writer of epistles, and, of course, a poet in his own right—one who bore holes through the hard granite of classical texts and made them accessible, reader-seeker-friendly. He was also a racy narrator of epics and tales of his own. A

living embodiment and practitioner of the four yogas, he was also sutra-like in his expositions. A nationalist of immense love for his country, he was also a bridge-builder between religion and science.

Insights on Arts and Literature

In this enormous range, where does art and literature stand? A brief answer would be: inseparable as wings of the spiritual consciousness. He declared unambiguously and forthrightly:

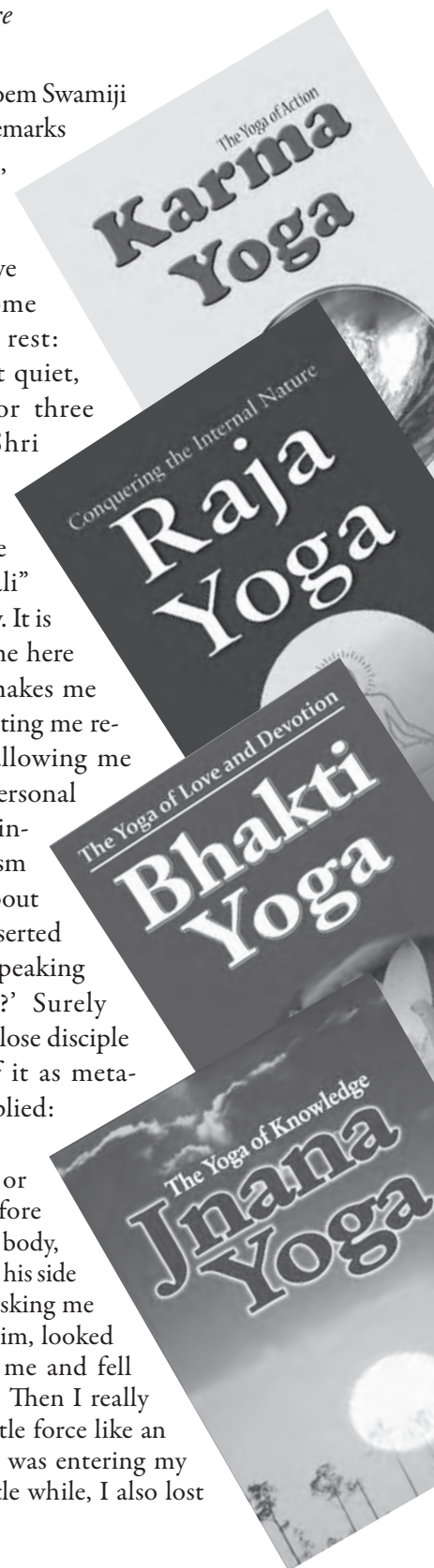
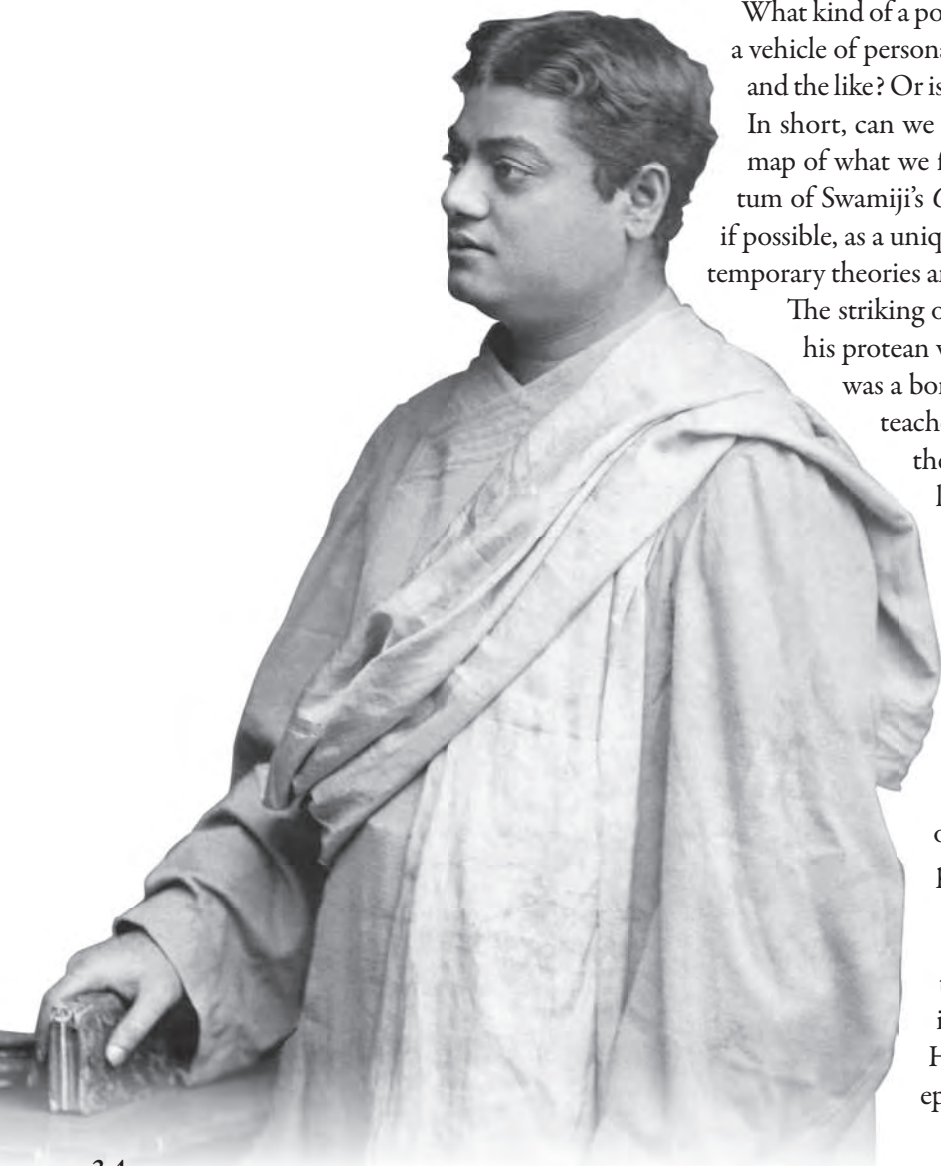
It is blasphemy to state that art is merely pleasing to the senses. One who has the mastery over the senses, who has overcome the body-idea, can alone appreciate true beauty, be it masculine, or feminine, or purely physical. We must see everything from the spiritual view-point. Nature is the manifestation of God. Ugliness and impurity are in the mind of him who sees ugliness and impurity. Non-appreciation of art is crass ignorance. True art, true poetry, true music must always be spiritual' (47–8).

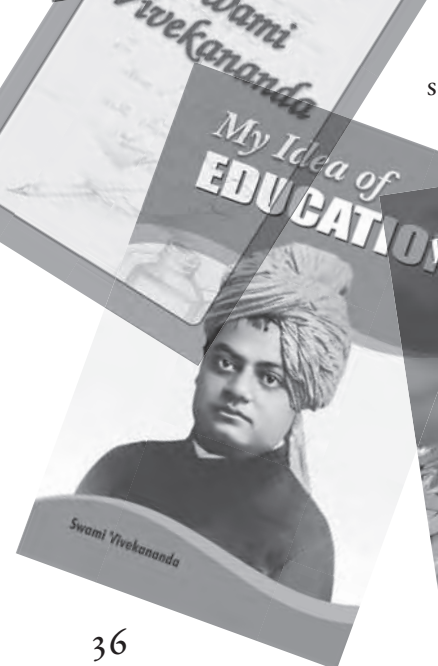
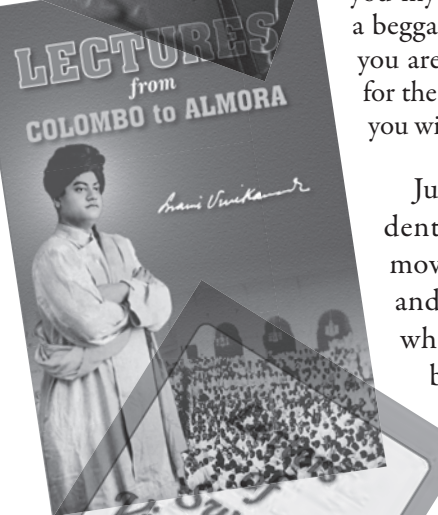
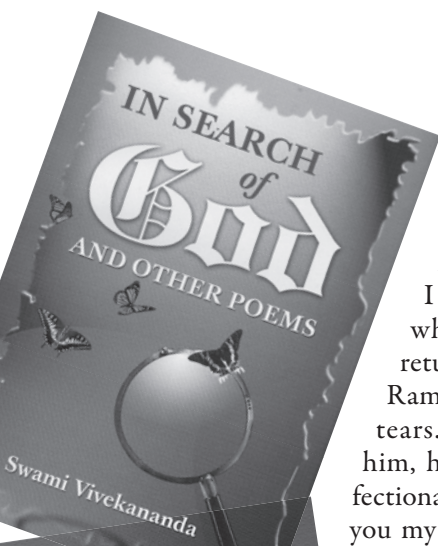
What is spiritual? Let us get some insight from Swamiji's corpus of oral and written texts. We could, perhaps, juxtapose one of the poems and two of his related prose statements to elicit a tentative frame. Look at the poem 'Let Shyama Dance There!':

True, they garland Thee with skulls,
but shrink back
In fright and call Thee, 'O All-merciful'!
At Thy thunder peal of awful laughter,
At Thy nudeness—for space is thy garment—
Their hearts sink down with terror,
but they say
'It is the demons that the Mother kills!'
They only pretend they wish to see Thee,
But when the time comes,
at Thy sight they flee.
Thou art Death! To each and all in the world
Thou distributest the plague and disease
—Vessels of venom filled
by Thine own hands.³

Besides this poem Swamiji made two more remarks about this theme, when a disciple suggested to him that he should give up work for some time and take rest: 'Am I able to sit quiet, my son! Two or three days before Shri Ramakrishna's passing away, She whom he used to call "Kali" entered this body. It is She who takes me here and there and makes me work without letting me remain quiet or allowing me to look to my personal comforts.' The ingrained scepticism of the disciple about such incidents asserted itself: 'Are you speaking metaphorically?' Surely surprised that a close disciple should think of it as metaphor, Swamiji replied:

Oh, no; two or three days before his leaving this body, he called me to his side one day, and asking me to sit before him, looked steadfastly at me and fell into Samadhi. Then I really felt that a subtle force like an electric shock was entering my body! In a little while, I also lost





outward consciousness and sat motionless. How long I stayed in that condition, I do not remember; when consciousness returned, I found Sri Ramakrishna shedding tears. On questioning him, he answered me affectionately, 'Today, giving you my all, I have become a beggar. With this power, you are to do many works for the world's good before you will return' (7.206-7).

Juxtapose this incident with the deeply moving poem on Kali and we get a clue to which literature can be called spiritual. This is not some woolly fanciful stuff with imagined outpourings. Its source is in that primal

Power from the fount of which emanate various forms with varied levels of creativity—that Power and its transmission are beyond our belief. Not only that, they disturb our normal views about illusion and reality, fancy and imagination. This is such a common reflex that 'hearing these words with speechless wonder the disciple thought—who knows how common people will take these words?' Wisely, 'he changed the topic' (7.207).

The extract from the poem on Kali and the narrative about the transmission of power are two integrally related manifestations of Swamiji's unified sensibility. The poem evokes the paradoxes with which humans respond to Kali, and the narrative tells us about the descent of the Power behind both. Common people cannot understand them says the disciple. The question is: Can we really understand the totality of a creative expression?

The tremendous orator who thundered throughout India by giving a clarion call for radical national regeneration also composed a poem on Kali: this paradox, topping all paradoxes, is Swamiji's rare sensibility to retain apparently dissimilar reflexes without the peril of a fragmented imagination and a truncated creativity. Functional categorization alongside fundamental unity of consciousness: this seems to be the 'Vivekananda creativity'. Moreover, Swamiji affirmed that the most creative imagination itself is not comparable to or a substitute for what he experienced. To receive the kind of experience Sri Ramakrishna gave, in Vivekananda's words, 'we have to get out of the body, out of mind and imagination, and leave this world out of sight. When we rise to be the absolute, we are no longer in the world—all is Subject, without object. ... [But] we are free and not free at the same time' (8.34-5).

Perhaps Swamiji's literary genres, especially his poetry and his racy narratives, can hint at the experience of this state. To cite another instance: 'One night, when all was calm, he [Swamiji] went alone to the side of the Ganges to meditate and commune with Nature. Coming back after a long time, he exclaimed to his Brother [Swami Akhandananda], "Look, tonight I have heard the Ganges streaming in *Kedar Ragini*.'" ⁴

Obviously, this is a context of *sahitya*, literature, and *sangita*, music, as inseparable coordinates. He heard the music and he described it for us. *Sahitya* is *alochanamrita*, nectar of cogitation, and yields the nectar of interior reflection; and *sangita* throws us into an instantaneous tasting of sweetness, *apata madhurya*. Both are evenly apportioned in Swamiji, whose singing made Sri Ramakrishna plunge into ecstasy quite often! Further clues are given to us by a related comment on the nature of such experience.



This [kind of experience] was not impossible for one who could hear the *Omkara-dhvani*, the un-vibrated sound of the Life vibration of the universe. Sometimes he [Swamiji] used to perceive one ceaseless Beauty in sound, taste and space. In the realisation of that infinite Beauty, at the dawn of which the poet is struck dumb, the painter's pencil drops from his hand and the sculptor stands motionless, the Swami would sing with proud elation:

Calmed are the clamours of the urgent flesh;
Hushed is the tumult of the boastful mind;
Cords of the heart are loosened and set free;
Unfastened are the bondages that bind;
Attachment and delusion are no more!

Aye! There sounds sonorous the Sound
Void of vibration! Verily Thy Voice! (55)

The experience that made Swamiji compose the poem is just not an aesthetic one. For poets, they say, 'thought is an experience'. For a rishi who is a poet, experience is not just emotions or thoughts recollected in tranquillity. Such poems are rarely posthumous crystallizations. They are marked by a simultaneous creative process. In short, *bhava* and *bhasha*—experience and expression—are a fused totality. Even imagination is transcended. It is *samanantara samagra drishti*, an equanimous holistic vision as well as *samagra srishti*, a vision of totality. What René Daumal in his classic book *Rasa* says comes close to what experience of such a nature in creating or enjoying is: 'It [the experience] is neither an object, nor an emotion, nor a concept; it is an immediate experience, a gestation of life, a pure joy, which relishes its own essence as it communes with the "other"—the actor or poet.'⁵

Daumal's synonym for *rasa* is knowledge of the Self, which evokes pure joy. 'Feeling is the soul, the secret of everything,'⁶ in Swamiji's words. And what he says in the context of yoga practice applies to creative writing too: 'Try to

keep up the imagination in Yoga, being careful to keep it *pure and holy*. We all have our peculiarities in the way of imaginative power; follow the way most natural to you; it will be the easiest' (8.51); (emphasis added).

The Power of Imagination


What, according to Swamiji, is imagination? With absolute clarity he says: 'The same faculty that we employ in dreams and thoughts, namely, imagination, will also be the means by which we arrive at Truth. When the imagination is very powerful, the object becomes visualised' (6.133). This is the power that is in everyone and, in the language of kundalini, its manifestation is a process of visualizing it. In the same way, 'the more powerful the imagination, the more quickly will the real result be attained' (8.47), with the awakening of kundalini. It is interesting to note that in a remarkable book entitled *Seven Little Known Birds of the Inner Eye*, the novelist and art critic Mulk Raj Anand has discussed many subtleties of the kundalini and the arts. Vivekananda, however, sounds a note of caution: 'Imagination properly employed is our greatest friend; it goes beyond reason and is the only light that takes us everywhere' (8.49).

A unique occasion in which this power beyond reason takes us everywhere happened when Vivekananda spoke at the Parliament of Religions: 'Sisters and Brothers of America.' The words created an instant communion, which made the huge gathering rise to their feet. What is it that they experienced? Inexplicable and intense joy. When Swamiji spoke, 'It fills my heart with joy unspeakable' (1.3), the listeners too felt, indeed experienced, that unspeakable joy. Explanations came later. As in the case of Kali entering the heart of Swamiji, in reality and not metaphorically, the solidarity and oneness of humanity had in that moment made an enduring entry.

In short—and, by extension—that context made a new linguistic miracle come into being. One with Bengali as his mother-tongue *spoke* in the 'other(s)' tongue without any conscious or unconscious feeling of being an alien. In fact, it was the historic moment when, through Swamiji, the subsequent, eminently simple language of Hindu texts in English came into

being. The *kantastha*, spoken, later assumed the *granthastha*, written form. *Shruti*, listening, and *smriti*, remembering, enriched each other. It is this factor that one can describe as the antithesis to the trends that followed and culminated in the loss of communion through the arts to communication of only information. Pointing out 'a shift from communal to





solitary experience', Richard Kearney says that 'our mass-media age has converted personal communication into a system of impersonal communications—a technological system in which experience becomes synonymous with information' with the threatening prospect of 'almost everything becoming information.'⁷

None can stop the trend, but Vivekananda literature balances knowledge with wisdom and even information given in such a way that it becomes instantly intelligible. His *Complete Works* are invariably in a language that he suggested should be a totality, in which *shabda*, sound; *artha*, meaning; and *jnana*, knowledge, blend. Such a language is remarkably aesthetic, without aestheticizing the subject. Only then comes joy—not just the titillating pleasure of words. Thus language could be used with an implicit awareness of what is *pleasure* and, what is *joy*.

In a remarkable study of aesthetics in daily life, Yuriko Saito quotes from a book on the

Tea Ceremony: 'If pleasure is not gratification accompanied by a sense of contentment, it is not real pleasure. ... If each individual is satisfied with his lot and is not envious, he will enjoy life because he knows contentment and will be contented because of enjoying his lot.'⁸ In other words, Swamiji's both oral and written texts constitute an immensely pragmatic art of lining, globally needed but difficult to accomplish.

This points to the enormous range Vivekananda literature yields. Studies of social, economic, and political thought of Swamiji are steadily increasing. If literature is inexhaustible to contemplation, Vivekananda's insights embrace almost every aspect of personal, interpersonal, national, and international areas. One *now* realizes his wisdom in exhorting that active politics should be left alone by Ramakrishna Mission. Invariably he followed the linguistic path that his Lord and Master did: 'Simplicity is the secret. My ideal of language is my Master's

language, most colloquial and yet most expressive. It must express the thought which is intended to be conveyed.'⁹

Naturalness of Language

Language to be simple should also be packed with the power of thought. Going through the *Complete Works* of Vivekananda at random, one is startled by the richness of the insight, the naturalness of the imagery, and above all, the explicit or implicit urge to make the thoughts live centres of activism. For instance, 'This is the theme of Indian life-work, the burden of her eternal songs, the backbone of her existence, the foundation of her being, the *raison d'être* of her very existence—the spiritualisation of the human race' (4.315).

The language of images is rich and the metaphors are all natural: burden, backbone, foundation, the *raison d'être*—a collocation of such a nature is bound to have an activating impact on the reader. As a writer puts it, the language and thoughts of Swamiji mark a radical landmark transition from 'the rigid formalism and illiberal literalism of the Pandit expounders of the Hindu scriptures' to 'a spirit of catholicism and charity.' In effect, his words 'clear and suggestive, though sharp and pliable like the edge of a fine steel which cuts through the stone, touched the heart with the delicacy of a flower.'¹⁰ The aesthetic of *dhvani*, suggestion, comes to mind.

A considerable portion of Swamiji's *Complete Works* has been reduced to the written form from oral transcriptions. It is the spoken words that literally kindled the inherent aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the listeners. In interpreting Swamiji's language, this aspect is of the greatest importance. If one looks at the traditions of Sanskrit, one realizes something that remains largely unexposed: with the orality

of his language, Swamiji has brought into being a unique continuity of classical linguistic tradition. It is the insight of Sheldon Pollock, in his massive study of Sanskrit, culture, and power in pre-modern India, that struck me as highly illuminating. He says: 'Long after writing became an everyday practice in the Sanskrit world, a bias towards the oral persisted, knowledge that is *kanthastha*, "in the throat", or memorized, was invariably privileged over knowledge that is *granthastha*, "in a book".' Thus we have the categories of language as 'speech' and language as 'text'. And 'the learned man in old India was the *vāgmin*, the master of speech, and not, as in Europe, the *litteratus*, the lettered man.' Pollock also cites Bhartrihari: 'Speech-informed awareness is the foundation of all knowledges [*sic*], arts, and artisanal practices.'¹¹

In these terms Swamiji's texts as speeches, or speeches as texts, form a highly fascinating uninterrupted continuity of the oral tradition of ancient texts and their vernacularization, not in Indian languages but in English. No wonder we can accept the refrain of Rajaji: 'English language is the greatest gift of Goddess Saraswathi to India.'¹² By using English Swamiji broke the insularity of India's cultural and spiritual heritage by upholding its oral aspect and link to vernacular languages. And speech—the spoken word—even in English, is best suited to expound the Source, the teaching from the fount of his consciousness: Sri Ramakrishna. In this sense the Dakshineswar and Kashipur phases are the re-enactments of the Upanishadic practice of oral discourses, magically re-visioned by Mahendranath Gupta.

Moreover, the shift to prose, by and large, is in tune with the democratic ethos in which we live now. This is eminently a stroke of *auchitya*, appropriateness, of both the medium and the message. This signalled the enduring advent of


Indian philosophical prose in English. Above all, Swamiji's language expresses and expounds truths that need certain preparedness in going beyond linguistic and aesthetic appreciation. Both thoughts of power and power of thoughts coalesce. And Vivekananda's *Complete Works* sustain interpretation of religious texts and religious interpretation of any text!

One has to also note the swami's exquisite skill in translating Sanskrit and Bengali texts. The most fascinating aspect is his translating some poems of Bhartrihari from Sanskrit. This he did orally for Sister Nivedita and meant it primarily for some Western devotees. Among other texts he also translated Acharya Shankara's *Nirvanashatkam*. This is an area wanting an in-depth exploration. Taking into account his translations from Bengali, it would be fascinating to have an overall view of Vivekananda as a translator.

Vivekananda has his own distinct identity in speaking and writing. His is not a derivative of the paraphrasing of other's ideas. Moreover, whether it is Vedas, Itihasa, Kavya, *Sutra Vangmaya*, narratives, or other genres, Swamiji's *Complete Works* reflect unmistakable traces that served him in terms of his own profound originality. All these point to the fact that his *Complete Works* are certainly a contemporary *kalpataru*, wish-fulfilling tree, and *kamadhenu*, wish-fulfilling celestial cow. The perceptions are oriented to *abhyudaya*, material prosperity, and *nihshreyasa*, spiritual growth; *preyas*, the pleasurable, and *shreyas*, the preferable. The overall result of all these factors is that a new value orientation to the writing and assessing of literature can be drawn and applied rigorously as a possible corrective to the extremities of literary culture today.

In 'My Master' Swamiji says that the ancient books and scriptures originated from direct

experience of spiritual facts. Swamiji extended the range of spirituality to the totality of all areas in which we live. It is this wholeness that the *Complete Works* of Swamiji embodies in peaks of literary excellence. Already we see literary figures like J D Salinger, not to speak of Christopher Isherwood, and others finding Swamiji fascinating. And there is also a pioneering comparative study of an American novelist and Swamiji.¹³

Obviously, the Vivekananda hermeneutic needs to be studied. The basic gain in such a hermeneutic is that *interpreting Swamiji's insights is in itself a profound meditation*. That is the *phalaprapti*, result attained. 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 9.500.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Vivekananda: The Man and His Message* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), 47.
3. *Complete Works*, 4.509.
4. *Vivekananda: The Man and His Message*, 54.
5. René Daumal, *Rasa, or, Knowledge of the Self: Essays on Indian Aesthetics and Selected Sanskrit Studies* (New York: New Directions, 1982), 41. Emphasis added.
6. *Complete Works*, 7.407.
7. Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 312.
8. Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University, 2007), 192-3.
9. *Complete Works*, 5.259.
10. *Vivekananda: The Man and His Message*, 167-8.
11. Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006), 82-3.
12. Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, *Rajaji: A study of His Personality* (Bangalore: Jeevana Karyalaya, 1975), 181.
13. I Joseph Ladislaus, *The Quest for Spirituality in Herman Melville and Swami Vivekananda* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2001).

Swami Vivekananda and Science

Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA WAS a humanist par excellence. However, unlike many other humanists his humanism was rooted in spirituality. A humanist is interested in all matters that concern humanity and judges everything by its human significance. Swami Vivekananda was no exception and he naturally had an immense interest in science, which has been occupying a dominant position in human thought for the last three centuries. Thus, it is relevant to examine and discuss Swamiji's attitude towards and opinion about science and its developments.

Scope and Limitations of Science

What did Swamiji understand by science? He clearly saw that the primary object of science is to solve the mystery of the universe.¹ In Swamiji's time, broadly speaking, the Cartesian tradition of keeping the mind firmly outside the ambit of science and the Newtonian paradigm of the physical sciences were still reigning supreme. In conformity with that, Swamiji observed that science attempted to solve the mystery of the universe by studying the external world objectively. The raw data used in this exercise were procured through sense perception, and the methods employed for analysing such data were based on human reasoning, which is rooted in the conscious mind. Swamiji discerned that scientific explanations were generally characterized by two overarching principles: (i) The particular was explained in terms of the general, and the general in terms of the universal; (ii) the explanation of an event or process was always sought in the nature of the things involved and not by bringing in an agent external to them.

This of course was in sharp contrast with the theological explanations advanced by theistic religions that accorded divine will and intervention crucial roles in determining the course of natural processes. Swamiji appreciated these two principles and thought



Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee is the president of the Calcutta Statistical Association and emeritus scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

that there is no reason why these should not be extended to the field of religion as well (2.329, 3.423). In fact, one reason of his espousal of Advaitic philosophy, particularly in the West, was that it conforms to these principles. However, Swamiji observed that while explaining a natural process by formulating a scientific law in accordance with these principles, one must remember two features common to all such laws.

Firstly, one must assume that nature invariably repeats itself according to certain habits and one must have the opportunity of observing several such repetitions. In other words, the postulate of 'uniformity of nature' has to be taken for granted (1.9). Hume's paradox states that one cannot logically deduce the principle of uniformity of nature—that the future will always resemble the past cannot be deduced by extending the experience of past observations to the present, since that would mean 'begging the question' or referring to one's own assertion to prove the assertion. Also human reasoning is liable to be vitiated by error for various reasons. Swamiji was fully aware of these chinks in the armour of science. That is why, commenting on the inviolability of scientific laws, he remarked: 'No amount of reasoning can demonstrate it; it can only make it probable, and there it rests. The highest demonstration of reasoning that we have in any branch of knowledge can only make a fact probable, and nothing further. The most demonstrable facts of physical science are only probabilities and not facts yet' (4.167).

The second thing to remember about science is that a scientific law does not really exist in nature. Swamiji pointed out that a law represents our 'expectation that a particular phenomenon will be followed by another, and that the series will repeat itself. Really speaking, therefore, the law does not exist in nature' (1.95). He adds that 'Law is the method, the manner in which our

mind grasps a series of phenomena; it is all in the mind. Certain phenomena, happening one after another or together, and followed by the conviction of the regularity of their occurrence—thus enabling our minds to grasp the method of the whole series—constitute what we call law (ibid.).

Because of these inherent features of a scientific law, we can never say that such a law represents an absolute truth. Swamiji warned: 'We must not let law become a superstition, a something inevitable, to which we must submit' (8.18). In this connection we are reminded of Sri Ramakrishna's refusal to accept the inviolability of natural laws, as reported by Swami Saradananda. In the course of a discussion about the efficacy of lightning conductors placed up high to protect a building against lightning, he cited instances of violation of the general rule.²

Apart from the above two features, Swamiji noted that limitations of all scientific laws also arise due to two more fundamental reasons, of which the first one has been partly conceded to by modern science, while the second remains and will possibly remain outside the ambit of science in the foreseeable future. As mentioned earlier scientific laws are reasoned out of sense data by the conscious mind. On the basis of the transcendental truths enunciated by Sankhya and Yoga psychology, Swamiji asserted: 'Consciousness is only the surface of the mental ocean.'³ And elsewhere he said that our conscious mind 'is but a drop in the mighty ocean of subconscious mind' (6.28).

Therefore, how can conclusions arrived at with the help of the conscious mind cover the whole truth? More explicitly, in a lecture entitled 'Maya and Illusion' in his *Jnana Yoga*, Swamiji said that 'the [conscious] mind is limited, that it cannot go beyond certain limits—beyond time, space and causation. ... Every attempt to solve

the laws of causation, time, and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three' (2.90-1). The ancient Rishis delved deep into their minds and intuitively discovered truths that go far beyond those that have been grasped so far by science. In modern times the importance of the subconscious or unconscious part of the mind was brought out by psychologists like Freud, Jung, and others in the first half of the twentieth century, well after Swamiji's passing away. But even then intuitive reasoning still has to depend upon the prop of conscious ratiocination to make its findings generally acceptable.

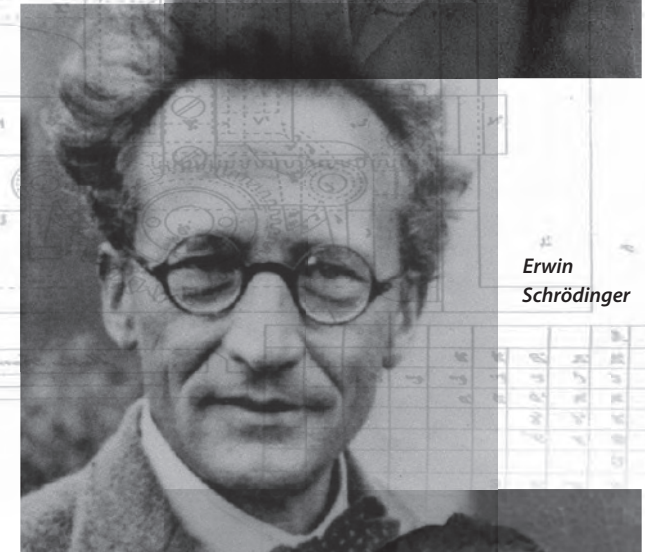
The second limitation of science noted by Swamiji is metaphysical. According to Vedantic cosmogony, the material as well as efficient cause of the universe is Brahman, which is of the nature of pure consciousness, which has no habitat and is not directed to any object or idea. A part of Brahman is projected as the universe of our experience. Swamiji raised this question: 'The sense universe is, as it were, only one portion, one bit of that infinite spiritual universe projected into the plane of sense consciousness. How can this little bit of projection be explained, be understood without knowing that which is beyond?' (3.2).

Thus, according to Swamiji, we can never hope to reach any ultimate solution to the mystery of nature; not to speak of the mystery of human existence, through science, which is limited to objective observation of external nature—attempts in this direction are doomed to failure by their very nature. Incidentally, about two decades after Swamiji's passing away, quantum theory was developed by Bohr (1885-1962), Schrödinger (1887-1961), Heisenberg (1901-1976), and others. It was then that scientists realized that the consciousness of the observer had to be invariably taken into account while interpreting the effect of objectively observed sense data on the

Neils Bohr



Erwin Schrödinger



Werner Heisenberg



behaviour of sub-atomic particles. Furthermore, in more recent times some theoretical physicists like Roger Penrose (b.1931) have articulated the need for expanding the scope of science if it is to explain the workings of the human mind.⁴

Value of Scientific Research

The above discussion must not lead us to form the impression that Swamiji regarded scientific research as valueless. Swamiji was a firm believer in the Upanishadic dictum that states that there are two kinds of knowledge: the higher and the lower.⁵ Generally speaking, the pursuit of both transcendental and secular knowledge is essential—the latter because it leads to the sharpening of the mind and the enhancing of the discriminatory capacity of the aspirant. More specifically, Swamiji valued scientific research because through it a person seeks to arrive at truth. In a lecture entitled ‘Vedanta as a Factor in Civilisation’, given in England, Swamiji observed: ‘It is too often believed that a person in his progress towards perfection passes from error to truth. ... But no error can lead to truth. The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is true; it goes from lower truth to higher truth.’⁶ Although Swamiji observed this in the context of the search for spiritual truth, there is no reason why the pursuit of scientific truth cannot be regarded as a lower rung in the ascent towards the ultimate truth. In fact, this is supported by what he said on two other occasions: ‘The mind works through various stages to attain its fuller development. First, it lays hold of the concrete, and only gradually deals with abstractions’ (5.193). And, ‘If we push enquiry far enough in the world of perception, we must reach a plane beyond perception. ... We feel the limited character of reason, yet it does bring us to a plane where we get a glimpse of something beyond’ (8.20).

Swamiji accorded scientific research the same place of honour as the pursuit of spirituality. In fact, he regarded science as a kind of religion. While emphasizing the need for developing a fellow-feeling among different types of religion, Swamiji identified branches of science as ‘expressions of religion whose heads, as it were, are penetrating more into the secrets of heaven though their feet are clinging to earth’, and then made his statement explicit by noting that by this he meant ‘the so-called materialistic sciences’ (2.68–9).

But did Swamiji value scientific research merely as an exercise that benefitted only the researcher? Was he indifferent to its findings? Anyone acquainted with his writings—especially his discourses on *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga*, his conversations with disciples like Sharatchandra Chakrabarty and Haripada Mitra, and his life and activities in the West as detailed by Marie Louise Burke—knows that the answer to these questions is in the negative. Swamiji’s interest in scientific findings had its roots in his faith in the truths of Vedanta apprehended through direct transcendental realization. He sought to see how far the conclusions of objective science could reflect those truths. What is more, on the basis of his Vedantic insight, Swamiji occasionally threw certain hints and made certain prognostications about the workings of nature, some of which surprisingly have been confirmed by scientists of those days and those who came later.

Before going into Swamiji’s evaluation of the findings of science, as available towards the end of the nineteenth century, we first put forth in a nutshell the Vedantic ideas about the origin of the universe and the workings of nature. Advaita Vedanta proclaims that behind the empirical world of our experience, as also behind all that is beyond our sensual and mental experience, there is only one Reality, which it calls

Brahman. It is said that Brahman is fundamentally in a state of equilibrium and is of the nature of existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute. Brahman is totally unaffected by the temporary, imperfect, and afflictive things of the relative world. An inscrutable power called maya seemingly disturbs the equilibrium of Brahman. This maya, which is supposed to be nature, apparently works on Brahman in the form of time, space, and causation and projects the world we experience, which is constituted of diverse entities—non-living things, living beings, ideas, and all the natural processes that work on and through them. The entities of the world are, so to say, Brahman caught and bound in the web of maya. The processes of nature represent the striving of these entities to free themselves and regain their lost equilibrium and basic unity.

The above conclusions of Vedanta have been directly apprehended and substantiated by innumerable seers from time immemorial. Swamiji, inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, himself verified these conclusions and took up the mission of proclaiming the central idea of Vedanta—the essential oneness and divinity of all existence—for the benefit of the whole humanity. His interest in the findings of science arose as part of this mission. He clearly saw that the end and aim of all science is to discover the unity that underlies all the entities and processes of nature. He gave expression to the Vedantic truths in a form that would be easily intelligible to the modern scientific mind and on many occasions endeavoured to show how the discoveries of science tend to conform to these.

Swamiji’s Reading of Scientific Truths

Swamiji accepted the account of the origin and evolution of the world as offered by the philosophical systems of Sankhya and Vedanta. However, while synthesizing and presenting the

principles of these systems, he simplified them to make them easily understood. According to him, the manifestation of the universe through the play of maya on Brahman takes place through the appearance of finer entities in two principal stages. The first entity to appear is Mahat, which Swamiji identified with the cosmic mind. Then Mahat bifurcates into two sub-entities: *akasha*, which is the basic and finest form of matter, and *prana*, which is the basic and subtlest form of energy.⁷ *Prana* then works on *akasha* and gives rise to whatever has form: non-living things, mountains, oceans, planets, stars, bodies of living beings, everything. *Prana* itself diversifies into all forms of energy, including the thought energy of higher animals and especially of human beings. Swamiji’s scientific insights into the workings of various aspects of nature are rooted mainly in these basic Vedantic principles. We will discuss them under four heads: (i) the cosmos, (ii) the physical universe, (iii) life, and (iv) the mind; and will try to relate his conclusions to the findings of modern science.

Before embarking on our discussion, we make two general remarks about the character of Swamiji’s scientific insights. Firstly, it will be seen that, although in some cases Swamiji’s conclusions have been confirmed by later scientific research, the route through which he arrived at those conclusions are often based on intuitive and metaphysical reasoning, which is naturally quite distinct from the hypothetico-deductive arguments advanced by scientists on the strength of experiments and observations. Secondly, we must not expect that Swamiji’s observations on the workings of nature would be proved true by every minute detail of later scientific findings. As Swamiji himself observed in the course of a discourse on jnana yoga, an illumined person knows the essence of the universe but he or she may not know all the external variations through



Astronomer Edwin Hubble looks through the eyepiece of the 100-inch telescope at the Mt Wilson Observatory in 1937

which that essence gets manifested in the phenomenal world: 'He knows the *clay* itself, but has not had experience of every shape it may be wrought into. ... He would have to attain more relative knowledge just as we do, though on account of his immense power, he would learn it far more quickly' (8.16–7).

(i) *The Cosmos* • Swamiji presented the theory of creation and dissolution of the universe, as presented in the ancient Indian scriptures, in a logical way and harmonized it with modern knowledge. He pointed out that everything in nature is created and gets dissolved in a cyclic way. A plant comes out of the seed, grows to become a gigantic tree, and then dies leaving other seeds to produce new trees. A bird springs from an egg, lives its life, and then dies leaving other eggs, future birds. The vapour rises from the ocean, is changed into rain drops that fall into the ocean, and are again converted into

vapour. Huge mountains are pounded into sand by the action of glaciers, the sand is deposited on the seabed layer after layer, and after ages hardens into a rocky mountain. Swamiji sets up the premise that creation and dissolution must follow the same plan at macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, and on the basis of instances such as the above, reaches the conclusion that at the beginning all things in the universe are in their fine causal form. In the course of time these evolve into their gross effect, which constitutes our phenomenal universe. Further, on the basis of the Sankhya principle that the effect is already present in the cause, he argues that Brahman, the cause of the universe, must be of the nature of intelligence or pure consciousness, as intelligence is already found in the higher animals on the earth. Through the play of maya Brahman evolves into the universe, which for a period remains in the phenomenal form and then dissolves back into Brahman. This whole process constitutes a *kalpa*, cycle, as it is termed in the Indian scriptures. The sequence of successive cycles goes on ad infinitum. Since time itself is subordinate to maya, one cannot raise questions about the beginning and end of the sequence.

In Swamiji's time scientists generally believed in an eternally static universe. Although following the formulation of Einstein's general theory of relativity in 1915, the Russian cosmologist Alexander Friedmann (1888–1925) had raised doubts about this belief and suggested alternative scenarios involving a non-static universe. Concrete experimental evidence in support of a gradually expanding universe became available only in 1929, after Edwin Hubble (1889–1953) came out with his observations on the recession of distant galaxies.

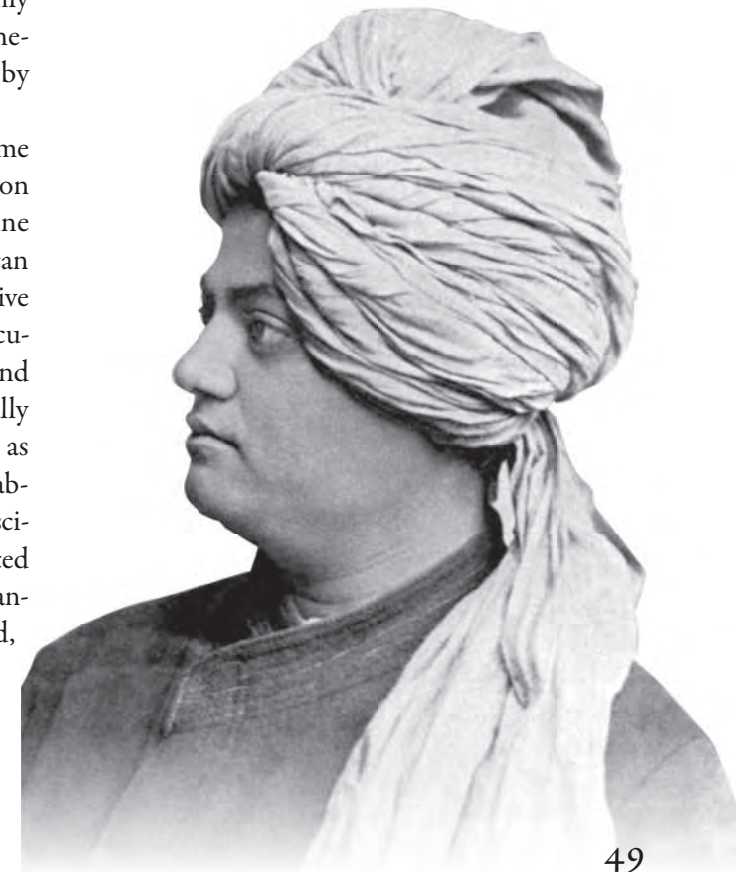
The idea of an expanding universe gave a boost to the Big Bang theory of the origin and

evolution of the universe. According to this theory, the universe as represented by matter, space, and time—the general theory of relativity states that the three are inseparably connected—originated abruptly with a big bang and since then has been progressively expanding. The theory as such does not say anything conclusive about the eventual fate of the universe, but cyclic variants have been suggested—one of them maintains that after a long period the process of expansion gets reversed and the contraction of the universe ultimately results in a 'big crunch'. Thus a cyclic process consisting of a succession of expansions followed by contractions continues through time. John Wheeler (1911–2008) has been one of the principal proponents of this cyclic theory and has sought to smooth out the singularities or kinks associated with the turning points where contraction changes into expansion.⁸ Although none of these proposals have been firmly established yet, the similarity of this cyclic theory with the Sankhya principle elaborated by Swamiji is obvious.

That space is inextricably linked up with time has been recognized after Einstein's formulation of the special theory of relativity in 1905. One of the main tenets of that theory is that we can think of and measure space and time only relative to a particular frame of reference, to a particular observer—the concepts of absolute space and time are vacuous. This has now been generally accepted by scientists. But in Swamiji's time, as noted earlier, under the Newtonian paradigm absolute space and absolute time dominated the scientific thought world. Yet Swamiji clearly stated that space and time, being aspects of maya, cannot but be relative: 'Time begins with mind, space also is in the mind. Causation cannot stand without time. Without the idea of succession there cannot be any idea of causation. Time, space and causation, therefore, are in

the mind.'⁹ In Swamiji's *Raja Yoga* also we find him observing this: 'What is time? An increase of speed, an increase of struggle, is able to bridge the gulf of time. That which naturally takes a long time to accomplish can be shortened by the intensity of action' (1.156).

The inseparability of the concepts of time and space, according to Einstein's special theory of relativity, can be seen easily by following the arguments of the German mathematician H Minkowski (1864–1909), who was one of the earliest interpreters of Einstein. Minkowski represented time as a fourth dimension over and above the three spatial dimensions. To see something from the point of view of an observer moving at a fixed velocity along a path in space implies to rotate the original axes so that the path of the observer becomes the new time axis. This means that two events that looked simultaneous



and occurred at different places to an observer stationary with reference to the earlier axes, would appear as occurring at different times at places a shorter or wider distance apart, with reference to the new axes. It is interesting to note that Swamiji also conceded the intimate connection between time and space, but he reached that conclusion by a metaphysical argument. In the course of a discussion with his disciple Haripada Mitra, who was a forest officer at Belgaum and had a scientific bent of mind, he argued that, if we accept both time and space to be infinite, then the two must be identical. For there cannot be two infinities; if there were, the existence of one would limit the span of the other.¹⁰

Einstein's general theory of relativity explains the fact of gravitation by supposing that the space-time continuum is itself curved. Before the formulation of this theory in 1916, who had thought about the real world being curved? Surprisingly, however, in Swamiji's writings we find the enigmatic statement: "There is no such thing as motion in a straight line. Every motion is in a circle. If you can take up a stone, and project it into space, and then live long enough, that stone, if it meets with no obstruction, will come back exactly to your hand. A straight line, infinitely projected, must end in a circle."¹¹ Note that Swamiji speaks here, in particular, of temporal processes and presents the idea of time as intimately associated with throwing and tracing the path of a stone and projecting a straight line in space.

(ii) *The Physical Universe* • As noted earlier, Swamiji's Vedantic conclusion was that all matter evolved from one primal matter, *akasha*, and all energy or force out of one primal energy, *prana*, and the two, in their turn, were evolutes of a more basic entity, Mahat, the cosmic mind. Hence, Swamiji believed that matter and energy were interconvertible. In a lecture delivered in London he said: 'From the fine elements they

go to finer and more embracing elements, and from these particulars they come to one omnipresent ether [*akasha*], and from that even they go to an all-embracing force or Prana; and through all this runs the principle, that one is not separate from the others. It is the very ether that exists in the higher form of Prana, or the higher form of Prana concretes, so to say, and becomes ether' (2.329–30). He was eager to see whether this interconvertibility of matter and energy could be established by science. Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), one of the leading lights of science in the US during Swamiji's time who attended some of his lectures, held out to Swamiji the hope that this interconvertibility could be demonstrated. In a letter dated 13 February 1896 Swamiji wrote to E T Sturdy that he was to go to Tesla's lab to see his demonstration (5.101). As Marie Louise Burke writes, Tesla was unsuccessful in his project, and one and a half years later, in a lecture delivered in Lahore, we find Swamiji observing: "There is the unity of force, Prana, there is the unity of matter, called Akasha. Is there any unity to be found among them again? Can they be melted into one? Our modern science is mute here, it has not yet found its way out."¹²

Swamiji passed away in 1902. We know now that had Swamiji lived for three more years, he would have been thrilled to know that Einstein's special theory of relativity supplied the unification he was so eagerly looking for. This theory tells us that energy has mass; the mass of a quantity of energy is obtained by dividing it by the square of the velocity of light in appropriate units. This finding was later on put to practice destructively in the creation of the atomic bomb and constructively for the generation of electrical energies from nuclear power plants. From another point of view, the identical nature of energy and matter was established when in the first quarter of the twentieth century the

particulate form of energy was brought out in the quantum theory, and this was followed up by Louis de Broglie's (1892–1987) counter-extension, which characterized matter by waves.

Another consequence of Vedantic cosmogony as presented by Swamiji is the unity of the different types of energy or force found in nature. According to Swamiji, all forms of natural force are variants of one basic force called *prana*. Physicists have identified four fundamental physical forces that are present in nature: the force of gravitation, the electromagnetic force, and two other forces called weak nuclear and strong nuclear forces, which are active in the atomic nucleus. Scientists have so far been able to establish that the electromagnetic and weak nuclear forces are actually variants of a single force—this unification was achieved by Nobel laureates Abdus Salam and Steven Weinberg in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Some theoretical progress towards further unification to subsume the strong nuclear force has also been made. However, the force of gravitation, as yet, stands isolated in the quartet. If and when all these four physical forces can be unified, we would take a giant step towards confirming Swamiji's thesis of the unity of all forces. Maybe the very recent discovery of the 'God particle' or Higgs Boson is one step forward towards such a grand unification. We have to remember, however, that even then the thought force that Swamiji had in mind as a variant of the primal *prana* would still remain elusive.

Swamiji himself identified electrical current with a kinetic energy of a sort. At that time the nature of electricity was not fully understood. However, Swamiji made this bold statement in his *Raja Yoga*, written around 1895: 'What electricity is no one knows, but so far as it is known, it is a sort of motion. There are various other motions in the universe; what is the difference between them and electricity? ... Electric motion

makes the molecules of a body move in the same direction. If all the air molecules in a room are made to move in the same direction, it will make a gigantic battery of electricity of the room.'¹³ Through a series of experiments starting in 1897, the British physicist J J Thomson (1856–1940) discovered the negatively charged elementary particles called electrons and characterized electricity as a stream of electrons—the correct role of electrons in the build-up of an atom became known only in 1911, when Ernest Rutherford (1871–1937) came out with his determination of the structure of an atom. It is noteworthy that if we replace the word 'molecules' in the above statement of Swamiji by 'electrons', it would describe the nature of electricity fairly accurately.

There is another area of physics in which Swamiji, by purely metaphysical arguments, drew a conclusion that was later experimentally and theoretically verified by physicists. At that time it was thought that light must require some kind of medium to travel through interstellar space, and it was hypothesized that an entity called 'ether', consisting of particles, permeated all space. In an article that appeared anonymously in the February 1895 issue of *New York Medical Times*, Swamiji pointed out that this supposition will leave various questions open:

There must be space between two particles of ether, however small; and what fills this inter-etheral space? ...

Thus the theory of ether, or material particles in space, though accounting for the phenomena in space, cannot account for space itself. ...

And, therefore, if there is anything which will explain this space, it must be something that comprehends in its infinite being the infinite space itself. And what is there that can comprehend even the infinite space but the Infinite Mind? (9.288–9).

As we know, the ether hypothesis had built-in paradoxes, as it could not explain why the motion of the earth through ether does not affect the relative velocity of light travelling in opposite directions, as was demonstrated by the Michelson-Morley experiment. The ether theory was finally laid to rest by the formulation of Einstein's special theory of relativity, following which James Clerk Maxwell's (1831–79) earlier characterization of light as a form of electromagnetic wave that needs no mechanical medium for its propagation was generally accepted.

(iii) Life • Vedanta declares the essential oneness and solidarity of all the entities in the universe. Can this be demonstrated scientifically? Coincidentally, around the time Swamiji was disseminating the message of Vedanta in the West and the East, a young physicist named Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858–1937) was performing experiments in his one-room laboratory in the Presidency College in Calcutta. With the help of innovative instruments he could record the electrical response of metal sheets, plants, and animals to mechanical, thermal, electrical, and chemical stimuli under varying conditions. Bose's experiments showed that the response graphs of diverse types of entities under identical stimuli were very similar. It was also seen that metals, when subjected to prolonged stimuli, just like tissues of living beings, exhibit the phenomenon of fatigue. These results led Bose to postulate that there was no unbridgeable gap between insentient matter and sentient beings, plants and animals, regarding the response to stimuli. Swamiji was well aware and appreciative of the new grounds Bose was breaking through his research. In fact, in 1900 when Swamiji visited Paris during his second sojourn to the West, Bose was also there to make presentations at a scientific congress, and the two used to meet frequently. From the reports of others

we know that Swamiji used to refer to Bose's work in glowing terms.¹⁴

Although Bose's findings about inorganic substances are yet to gain universal acceptance, his conclusion about the similarity of the behaviour of plant and animal tissues have been confirmed and extended by experiments performed with more sensitive instruments by a host of researchers in different countries. Bose's epoch-making work, presented in the Royal Institution of London in the early twentieth century, caused considerable flutter in scientific circles. In recent years some psychologists and other scientists have postulated the presence of some kind of mentality and intelligence in all objects of the world and developed a theory of panpsychism.¹⁵

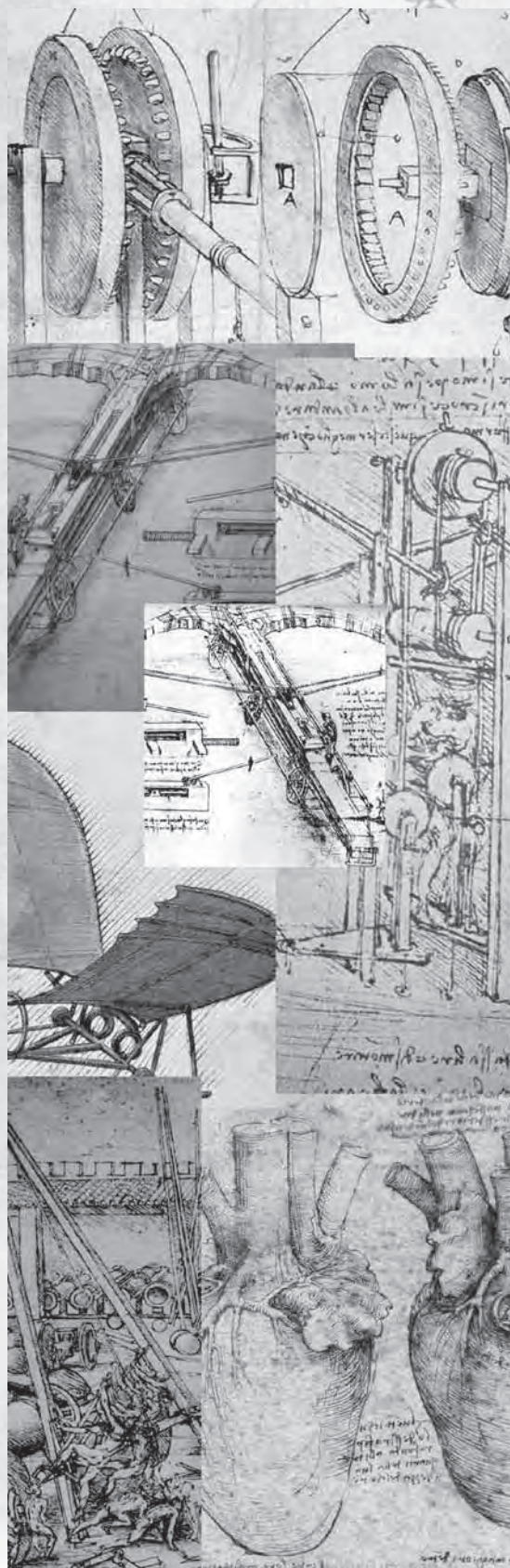
After the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the theory of evolution through struggle for existence, competition, survival of the fittest, and natural selection captivated the minds of life scientists all over the world. However, Swamiji thought that the theory provided only a partial explanation of the evolution of life on earth. In his view, the driving force behind evolutionary change of one species into another is the urge of the Divine inherent in existence to unshackle its bondage and to manifest its intrinsic freedom. Commenting on an aphorism of Patanjali in his *Raja Yoga*, and elsewhere, he said that this manifestation occurs by itself as soon as the hindrances to it are removed.¹⁶ Competition, struggle for existence, and the rest are but incidental to this process and operative at lower stages of evolution only, when struggle is mainly at the physical level. At higher stages, when the struggle rises to the mental level, progress occurs mainly through education, self-cultivation, and self-sacrifice.

Interestingly, some later renowned thinkers on evolution like the palaeontologist Teilhard

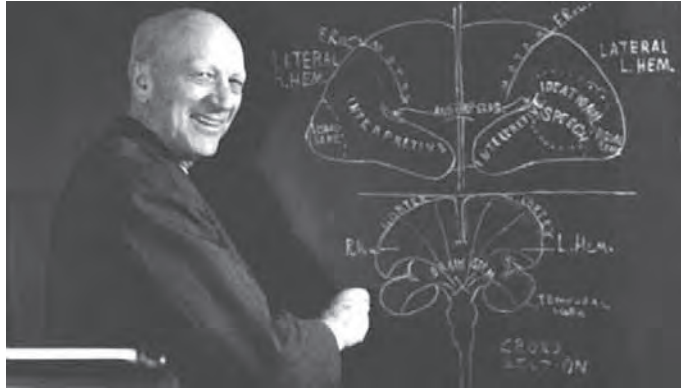
de Chardin (1881–1955) and the bioscientist Julian Huxley (1887–1975) have taken a stand close to the view expressed by Swamiji. According to Teilhard de Chardin, there is an all-pervading consciousness in the universe, which is free and the source of all supra-physical or psychic energy. Evolution on earth is taking place by a progressive manifestation of this consciousness through 'complexification' of life. Evolution in the modern human being, dominated as it has been by the sphere of thought, is more psychosocial than biological. Huxley also is largely in agreement with this view.¹⁷ Even Richard Dawkins (b.1941), the hard-headed protagonist of evolution through propagation and mutation of genes, admits the importance of transmission of ideas—he coins the term *meme* to denote idea-units—such as those calling for development of 'true altruism' and 'the capacity to simulate the future' in human evolution.¹⁸

(iv) The Mind • Unlike the material monists of today, who try to explain everything in the universe in terms of objectively observable matter and identify mind with the neuronal activities of the brain, Swamiji asserted that the mind is distinct from the body. He observed: 'The mind cannot be analysed by any external machine. Supposing you could look into my brain while I am thinking, you would only see certain molecules interchanged. You could not see thought, consciousness, ideas, images. You would simply see the mass of vibrations—chemical and physical changes. From this example we see this sort of analysis would not do.'¹⁹

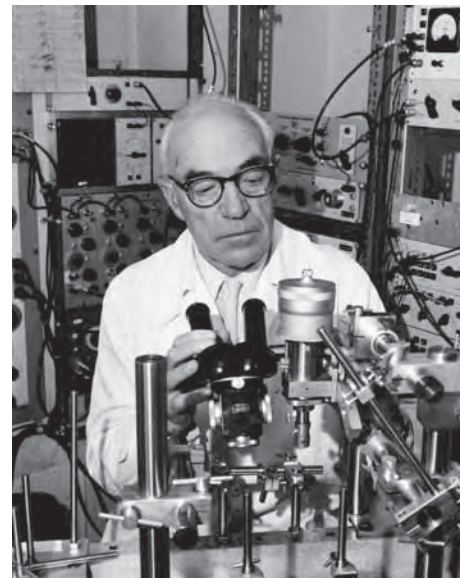
It is to be noted that the same objection against material monism has been raised in recent times by researchers on consciousness like David John Chalmers (b.1966). Chalmers distinguishes between 'the easy problem of consciousness', which may be solved by tracking the



ART: COLLAGE OF LEONARDO DA VINCI'S SCIENTIFIC DRAWINGS



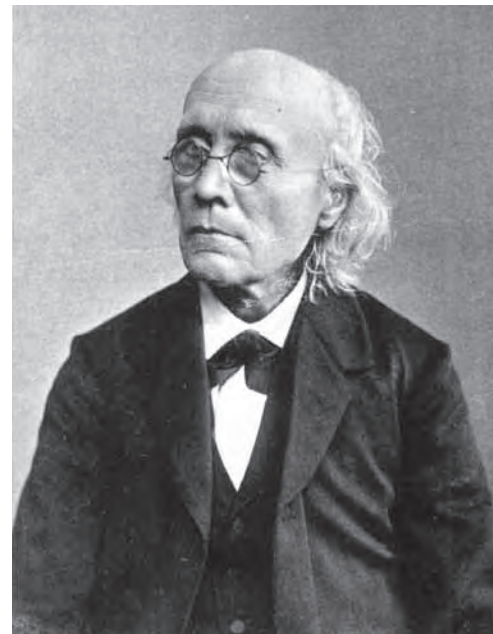
Wilder Graves Penfield



John Carew Eccles



Edmund Husserl



Gustav Fechner

activities of the brain cells, and ‘the hard problem of consciousness’, to solve which we have to account for qualia or subjective experiences like those of redness, sweetness, pain, and the like.²⁰ Roger Penrose also has admitted that the problem of qualia cannot be solved by studying the mechanism of the activities in the brain with the currently available tools of science.²¹

Interestingly, as techniques of non-invasive observation of the inside of the brain developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, well-known neurophysiologists such as Wilder Penfield (1891–1976) and John Eccles (1903–97) experimentally reached the conclusion that the mind is a higher order entity which is distinct from but activates the physical brain.²²

However, that Swamiji regarded the mind as distinct from the physical body does not mean that he accepted the mind to be non-material and free. Swamiji agreed with the Vedantic position that the mind also is a form of matter, though finer than sensually perceptible gross matter. He maintained that just like everything else in nature, the mind also has its patterns of behaviour and is subject to laws. It is of utmost importance to study the science of the mind and understand these laws, since only in that way can we go beyond misery and attain true happiness.

Swamiji called psychology ‘the science of sciences’.²³ Note that this observation was made at a time when Western scientists, led by persons like Gustav Fechner (1801–87), had just started breaking away from the Cartesian tradition of avoiding a discourse on mind and had started studying it scientifically. Swamiji, however, knew that in studying the mind we cannot obtain observations objectively as in the case of the traditional sciences and have to depend on first-person experiences—in recent years some psychologists influenced by Edmund Husserl’s (1859–1939) philosophy of phenomenology, have also recognized the importance of processing first-person experiences in the study of the mind.²⁴ Further, Swamiji emphasized that collecting and processing such subjective experiences require considerable discipline and training on the part of the subject.

If the mind is not a correlate of the body, how, in the first place, is it acquired by a person? The Vedantic view is that the mind generally continues to exist after the destruction of the body and takes birth in a new body—the mind of a person is acquired from a previous birth. Independent existence and transmission of the mind may not look too absurd if we remember that according to modern physics

force-fields may exist and get propagated in space without a material medium. Admittedly, most Western scientists, including even those like Erwin Schrödinger and Julian Huxley who are sympathetic to Vedantic ideas, find it difficult to accept the theory of rebirth. Swamiji knew the difficulty and citing the inborn instincts of living beings, like the chicken’s fear of the hawk and the duckling’s love of water, pinpointed the issue by stating that if we agree that instincts are the result of past experience, then the question is ‘whether that experience belongs to a particular soul, or to the body simply, whether this experience which comes to the duck is the duck’s forefathers’ experience, or the duck’s own experience.’²⁵ Since modern science tells that an offspring gets its body only from its parents, if we accept that the mind is *not* a correlate of the body determined by the genes, how shall we justify the position that our instincts come from our forefathers? Of course, Swamiji knew transcendently that rebirth is a fact of nature and clearly stated: ‘The law governing the functions of the human mind is called the law of Karma’ (8.244).

To conclude we reiterate an important concept discussed earlier: the mission of Swamiji’s life was to uplift humanity in general and the Indian masses in particular by disseminating the ideal of oneness of all existence. His interest in science arose because he saw that it can help to fulfil that mission, by rationally establishing in a present-day language the unity that runs through all nature. This is borne out by his proclamation that the ideal of oneness ‘is the one great life-giving idea which the world wants from us today, and which the mute masses of India want for their uplifting, for none can regenerate this land of ours without the practical application and effective operation of this ideal of the oneness of things’ (3.189). ☸

The author thanks Swamis Atmapriyananda and Divyasukhananda for providing suggestions for the article.

References

1. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.90–1.
2. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 634.
3. *Complete Works*, 1.9.
4. See Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind* (London: Oxford University, 1994), 12.
5. See *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.4.
6. *Complete Works*, 1.385.
7. See *Complete Works*, 1.147–8, 2.263–5, 3.400–1, and 5.101–2.
8. For an account of the Big Bang theory and its cyclic extensions see Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World* (New York: Penguin, 1993), Chapter 2.
9. *Complete Works*, 2.78.
10. *His Eastern and Western Admirers, Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 38, 50.
11. *Complete Works*, 1.196.
12. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), 3.504. Also *Complete Works*, 3.400.
13. *Complete Works*, 1.161.
14. See *His Eastern and Western Disciples, The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.538.
15. See *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David John Chalmers (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 247.
16. See *Complete Works*, 1.292, 5.277–9; 7.151–5.
17. See Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 1959), to which Julian Huxley adds a long introductory preface.
18. See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (London: Oxford University, 1989), 200–1.
19. *Complete Works*, 7.431.
20. See *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 247.
21. See *Shadows of the Mind*, 15–6, 42–4, 420.
22. See Swami Ranganathananda, *Neurology and What Lies Beyond* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996), 2–6, and Michael Talbot, *Beyond the Quantum* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 103–7.
23. *Complete Works*, 6.28.
24. See D J Chalmers, ‘Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness’, *Consciousness Studies*, 2/3 (1995), 200–19.
25. *Complete Works*, 1.240.



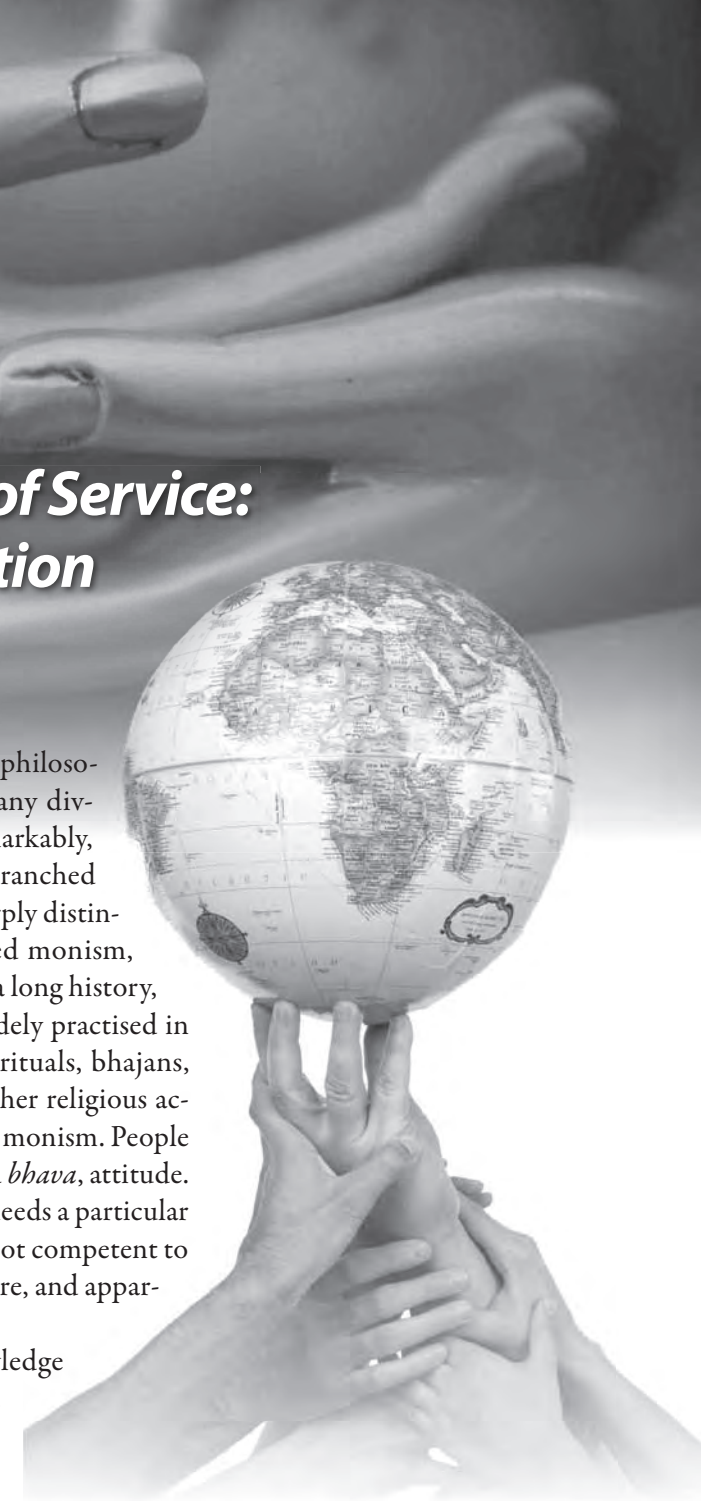
Vivekananda's Ideal of Service: A New Path to Liberation

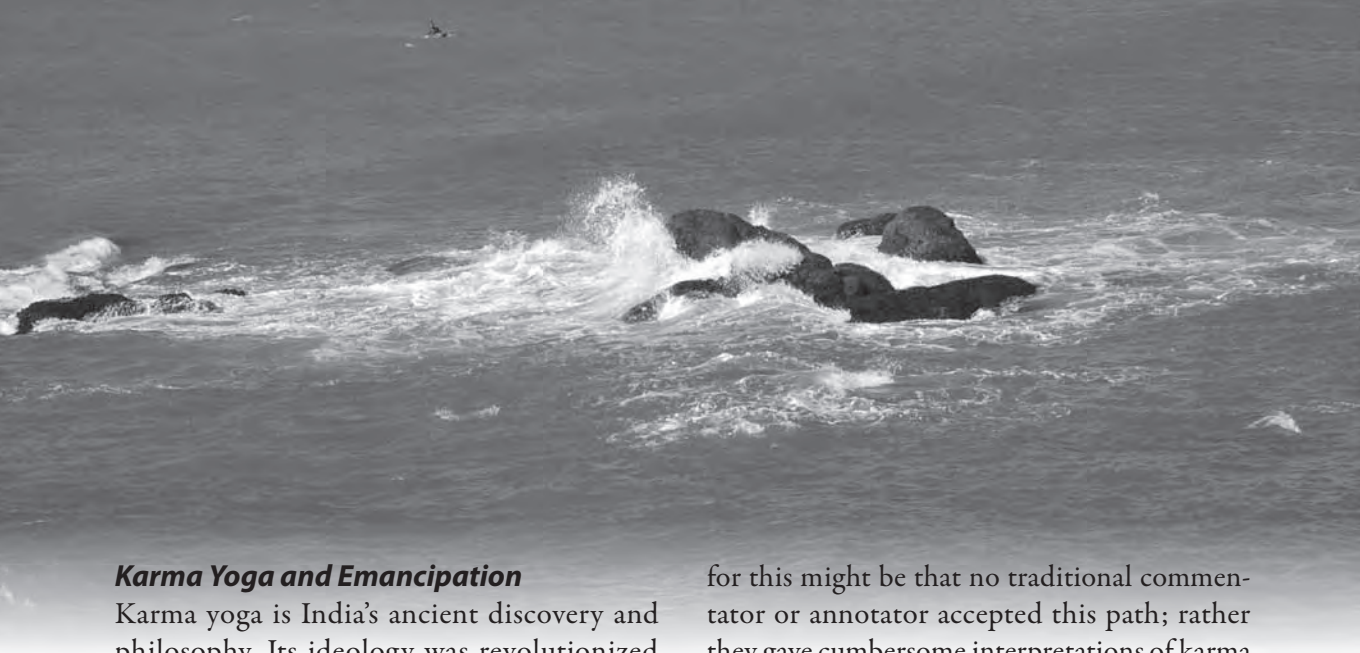
Swami Nirantarananda

INDIA IS THE LAND OF many religions and philosophies. Even within a single philosophy many divisions and sub-divisions have evolved. Remarkably, more than ten major schools of thought have branched out of Vedanta. The three popular ones are sharply distinguished from one another—dualism, qualified monism, and monism. Though these three schools have a long history, it is dualism and qualified monism that are widely practised in India. People generally devote themselves to rituals, bhajans, recitations, discourses, visiting temples, and other religious activities, which are based on dualism or qualified monism. People rarely worship God in the Advaitic method and *bhava*, attitude. To worship God as non-different from oneself needs a particular state of the mind and temperament. Many are not competent to face the challenges of practising the stern, austere, and apparently dry Advaita *bhava*.

Swami Vivekananda had experiential knowledge of the three schools of Vedanta and found in them no contradictions. He said: ‘One is simply the fulfilment of the other.’¹ Sadhakas progressing in spiritual life find that dualism, qualified monism, and monism come one after another as stages. This concept of harmony among various schools of Vedanta is Sri Ramakrishna’s and Swamiji’s unique contribution to the religion and philosophy of India.

Swami Nirantarananda is the secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramharipur, West Bengal.





Karma Yoga and Emancipation

Karma yoga is India's ancient discovery and philosophy. Its ideology was revolutionized by Swamiji, and it is now a new path suited to the age. It was perhaps Swamiji alone who said that karma yoga or selfless action is a direct path to moksha, liberation, and not dependent upon any other discipline. Teachers before him, including Acharya Shankara, considered selfless actions as means of the purification of the mind; they held that it can never lead the aspirant directly to freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. Selfless action leads the aspirant gradually through different stages of spiritual growth. These stages are 'purification of the mind or moral excellence along with *upāsana* (devotion to and meditation on qualified Brahman); acquisition of knowledge from a teacher and the scriptures, followed by renunciation of all rites and duties (monasticism), which makes one *fit* for steadfastness in that knowledge; steadfastness in that knowledge; removal of ignorance and self-revelation of the supreme Brahman, which is the same as Liberation.'² Swamiji made a small change in this doctrine by holding that karma yoga leads to liberation independently of the other yogas—bhakti, raja, or jnana. Though we find Swamiji's idea also in the Bhagavadgita, it was not popular among spiritual aspirants before Swamiji. The reason

for this might be that no traditional commentator or annotator accepted this path; rather they gave cumbersome interpretations of karma yoga. Through his inspiring lectures and talks Swamiji re-invigorated people with the teachings of the Gita and unleashed the tremendous power of karma yoga.

Swamiji once elucidated karma yoga or 'doing good to others' to his disciple Sharatchandra Chakravarty, who was well versed in the scriptures: 'Know this also to be one of the spiritual practices, a discipline for God-realisation. Its aim also is Self-realisation. Exactly as that aim is attained by Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and so on, also by work for the sake of others.'³ The disciple raised a cogent objection: 'If I rest wholly occupied with something particular and relative, how can I realise the Atman which is Absolute?' (Ibid.). Swamiji beautifully refuted it saying: 'If you, by being devoted to the service of others and by getting your heart purified by such work, attain to the vision of all beings as the Self, what else remains to be attained in the way of Self-realisation?' (Ibid.).

Swamiji, in his lecture 'Non-attachment is Complete Self-abnegation', said in conclusion that all yogas, including karma yoga, lead the individual to perfection. A true karma yogi is unselfish. Swamiji said: 'This attainment does not depend on any dogma, or doctrine, or belief.

Whether one is Christian, or Jew, or Gentile, it does not matter. ... The Yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Moksha' (1.93). Only the learned know the secret of this truth present in the yogas. 'Each one of our Yogas,' Swamiji held, 'is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of the others, because they have all the same goal in view' (ibid.).

The conjunction of Jnana and Karma:

The conjunction of jnana and karma—*jnana-karma-samuchchaya*—has been refuted by Shankara. He held that a person could never simultaneously practise Advaita jnana and Vedic ritualistic karma. Karma, being a combination of many accessories, is by nature dualistic and cannot be combined with Advaita jnana. Shankara says in his commentary on the *Isha Upanishad*: 'For when *vidyā* (knowledge) arises, *avidyā* (*karma*) vanishes, since in the person in whom there is knowledge, *avidyā* (*karma*) cannot remain. Indeed, it is a fact that when the knowledge, "Fire is hot and effulgent", has arisen in a person, then in that very person, in whom that knowledge has dawned, cannot arise the ignorance or doubt or error (of the form), "Fire is cold or non-illuminating".'⁴

Swamiji clearly held that moksha can never be attained by mere karma, which is by nature dualistic. He said to his disciple: 'Know that in the knowledge of Brahman there is no touch of any relation to work.'⁵ But Swamiji draws our attention to the good works done by people after having realized Brahman: 'Well, the truth is this. The knowledge of Brahman is the ultimate goal—the highest destiny of man. But man cannot remain absorbed in Brahman all the time. When he comes out of it, he must have something to engage himself. At that time he should do such

work as will contribute to the real well-being of people. Therefore do I urge you in the service of Jivas in a spirit of oneness' (7.197). So, we do find the coexistence of Advaita jnana and unselfish work in the lives of *jivanmuktas*, the living free. Shankara knew very well that what is perceived can never be denied.⁶ He explained in his commentary that *jivanmuktas* like Janaka and Ashvapati 'strove to attain liberation through action itself.'⁷ In his commentary on the Gita, he said that their actions could not be technically called karma; hence the impossibility of the conjunction of jnana and karma in a person stands unshaken.⁸ Janaka and Ashvapati's actions were not karma because they were free from the sense of agentship and desire for results. Though Shankara did not admit the conjunction of jnana and karma philosophically, he accepted it in a practical way. At the same time, he found no contradiction between Advaita jnana and the actions of Vasudeva, Janaka, and other *jivanmuktas*. These actions are also Advaitic in nature because such actions are the manifestation of the knowledge of Brahman. Now it is clear that by prescribing unselfish actions for the good of the world with an Advaitic perspective, Swamiji does not go against the age-old doctrine of non-conjunction of jnana and karma. With due respect to the scriptures and holy traditions, Swamiji repeatedly proclaimed: 'They [shastras] also say that work or service for the good of others leads to this state of Jivanmukti. Otherwise there would be no need on the part of the Shastras to teach a separate path of religious practice, called the Karma-Yoga.'⁹

Swamiji explained in detail to his disciple this new idea of karma yoga:

The various methods of spiritual practice that have been laid down in the scriptures are all for the attainment of the knowledge of the Atman. ... But they also are a kind of work, and so long as there is work, the Atman is not discovered.

The obstacles to the manifestation of the Atman are overcome by practices as laid down in the scriptures; but work has no power of directly manifesting the Atman, it is only effective in removing some veils that cover knowledge. Then the Atman manifests by Its own effulgence. Do you see? Therefore does your commentator (Shankara) say, 'In our knowledge of Brahman, there cannot be the least touch of work' (7.178).

Traditional Advaitins practise *jnana-nishtha*, steadfastness in knowledge, or the practices called *shravana*, hearing; *manana*, cogitation; and *nididhyasana*, meditation, after having been duly qualified through the purification of the mind, renunciation, and the like under a guru. These practices are considered Advaitic and are not called karma by traditional gurus. From Swamiji's statement it is clear that he considers these Advaitic practices also to be karma. Sri Ramakrishna also had the same view as Swamiji.¹⁰ According to Swamiji, service with the

bhava is the same as the practice of *jnana-nishtha* by traditional Advaitins. The only difference is this: in *jnana-nishtha* one seeks the Reality in oneself; in *seva*, service, the aspirant seeks the Reality in the served. Swamiji's ideal of *seva* is thus Advaitic in nature.

Seva Based on Advaita

The Vedic people extensively practised various karmas as religious disciplines. This can be gauged by the voluminous *karma-kanda*, ritual section, of the Vedas. We find some means of spiritual illumination through karma for the first time in the Gita: doing good to all people; spiritual well-being through the performance of one's own duties according to caste and ashrama of life; service to God in a ritualistic way with devotional offerings of fruits, flowers, leaves, water, and the like. Doing philanthropic work has become popular all over the world in the modern age. This practice of philanthropy has also been

revolutionized by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, particularly in India. He infused a new life into the system of karma yoga.

Devotees worship God in images or pictures by maintaining a devotional mood or by cultivating a definite relationship with God. Such moods or relationships are usually based on dualism or qualified monism, and people are comfortable worshipping God in this manner. Many worship God in humans and other living beings instead of an image. Sri Ramakrishna accepted and undertook many spiritual disciplines and then declared the doctrine of harmony: 'As many faiths, so many paths.'

But a question that looms large is whether the lofty Advaita ideal can be practical. Swamiji was the first to apply this sublime philosophy to day-to-day activities—small or big—of the common people. This was Swamiji's great contribution.

The teaching of Advaita Vedanta is traditionally summed up as: '*Brahma satyam jaganmithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah*; Brahman is real and the world is unreal, the jiva is none other than Brahman.' Shankara established the superiority of Advaita Vedanta over other philosophical schools through his sharp intellect and marvellous interpretation of the Upanishads. The great Acharya, compassion incarnate, wanted to lead humanity to freedom by destroying ignorance through *jnana*, obtained through *vichara*, discernment. A few centuries after his passing, some post-Shankara scholars laid more stress on the establishment of the falsity of the world and on the absolute reality of Brahman in its transcendental or non-relational aspect. Indeed, they would be overjoyed if any brilliant scholar could establish that the world had not been created at all! For all these philosophical views they depended entirely on their sharp intellectual speculations, cut off from practical life. To them the human world was a part of *maya* and they took

shelter in monasteries, caves, or forests to avoid human contact. As a result, Advaita was reduced to a subject of study by scholars, students, and teachers. The common masses lost all contact with the Advaita ideal.

Swamiji, however, found Advaita Vedanta to be the greatest source of all arts, literature, science, technology, religion, and philosophy. Advaita, when applied in daily life, can give rise to knowledge, strength, and love. His mission was to help humanity build a glorious unparalleled civilization through the practice of Advaita. He was convinced of the practicality of Advaita and expressed it once to Mohammed Sarfaraz Husain of Nainital in a letter: 'Whether we call it Vedantism or any *ism*, the truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity.'¹¹ Swamiji was attracted towards the immanent aspect of Brahman, which is a positive way of looking upon every being as Brahman. When established in this state one sees one's own self present everywhere in the world. He once explained this wonderful state to a disciple: 'You will feel the whole sentient and insentient world as your own self. Then you can't help treating all with the same kindness as you show towards yourself. This is indeed practical Vedanta' (7.163). On another occasion, while talking with Sharatchandra Chakravarty, Swamiji urged: 'We must prove the truth of pure Advaitism in practical life. Shankara left this Advaita philosophy in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the workaday world and society. The lion-roar of Advaita must resound in every hearth and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains. Come all of you to my assistance and set yourselves to work' (7.162).



In a Sanskrit letter to a disciple Swamiji clearly stated that his ideal of service is based on Advaita: 'This being so, as Jiva and Ishvara are in essence the same, serving the Jivas and loving God must mean one and the same thing. Here is a peculiarity: when you serve a Jiva with the idea that he is a Jiva, it is Daya (compassion) and not Prema (love); but when you serve him with the idea that he is the Self, that is Prema. That the Atman is the one objective of love is known from Shruti, Smriti, and direct perception' (5.133). Swami Gambhirananda used to quote this Gita verse: 'The ladle is Brahman, the oblation is Brahman, the offering is poured in by Brahman in the fire of Brahman.'¹² He used to explain the verse saying that all the accessories needed to perform an action are only various manifestations of one Reality—Brahman. Moreover, the concept 'jiva is Shiva' is upheld by Advaita alone.

The Advaitic method of seva is 'worship of the spirit by the spirit'. In 1900 in San Francisco Swamiji explained the purest form of Advaita Vedanta and announced that he had already started applying this Advaita Vedanta:

The whole universe is one existence. There cannot be anything else. Out of diversities we are all going towards this universal existence. ... on the heights of the Himalayas I have a place where I am determined nothing shall enter except pure truth. There I want to work out this idea about which I have spoken to you today. ... The hour comes when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful the true religion, the worship of the spirit by the spirit' (8.138, 140-1).

Swamiji would often quote two verses from the Gita: 'That (knowable), which has hands and feet everywhere, which has eyes, heads, and mouths everywhere, which has ears everywhere, exists in creatures by pervading them all' (13.13).

'Since by seeing equally God who is present alike everywhere he does not injure the Self by the Self, therefore, he attains the supreme Goal' (13.28). Swamiji would inspire people to do good to others while remembering this idea of unity.

Faith in God Is not Absolutely Necessary

Swamiji, 'a man without frontiers', boldly and rationally removed all kinds of narrow ideas that stood in the way of karma yoga becoming effective. Swamiji would also not miss any opportunity to pay homage to Buddha. We do not definitely know whether Buddha was a believer or not. But it is evident that he rejected the prevailing religious traditions, scriptures, Vedic rituals, and sacrifices. Buddha's boundless love and compassion embraced everyone, even animals. He once begged a king for the life of a lamb in exchange of his own. 'He never drew a breath for himself.'¹³ In a talk delivered in Detroit Swamiji said: 'This man [Buddha] was without any motive power. He stands as the perfection of the active type, and the very height to which he attained shows that through the power of work we can also attain to the highest spirituality' (4.136). That is why in *Karma Yoga* Swamiji described him as 'the ideal Karma-Yogi' and 'a working Jnani'. 'Buddha may or may not have believed in God; that does not matter to me. He reached the same state of perfection to which others come by Bhakti—love of God—Yoga, or Jnana' (ibid.). For Swamiji, the secret of success in karma yoga lies in the perfection of the service to humanity without any motive, and not through faith in God. He was bold enough to declare: 'Perfection does not come from belief or faith. ... Perfection comes through the disinterested performance of action' (4.136-7).

A question may arise: What will be the nature of realization attained through karma yoga by an aspirant who is a non-believer? For a



Mahapajapati Gotami requesting permission from Buddha to establish the Bhikkhuni Sangha (Order of Nuns)

non-believer perfection itself will be God, not a personal God but the impersonal like selflessness, consciousness, or absolute bliss. Swamiji says: 'Unselfishness is God' (1.87).

Gambhirananda pointed out another difference between Swamiji's ideal of service and the traditionally accepted karma yoga. He said that from the very beginning, work according to Swamiji's karma yoga is meant entirely for the sake of others; the sense of personal agent-ship is absent. So the question of offering the results of such work to God does not arise, as this person has no claim regarding the results. The worker gets no time to think that he is the doer and is going to attain the results of the work he is doing. This idea is also supported by Sri Krishna in the Gita: 'You have the right only for actions, never for the results.'¹⁴

Special Characteristics

Traditionally, 'karma' means Vedic rituals prescribed by Vedic injunctions. Karma done with motives leads to various results, as declared by

the scriptures; karma done without any motive purifies the mind. Swamiji, liberal and rational as he was, gave a broad definition of 'karma': 'The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit Kri, to do; all action is Karma. ... But in Karma-Yoga we have simply to do with the word Karma as meaning work.'¹⁵ Sri Krishna's meaning of 'karma' is also close to 'work' or 'action': 'O son of Kunti, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as a sacrifice, whatever you give and whatever austerities you undertake, that you offer to Me.'¹⁶ Swamiji wanted people to do actions that will provide spiritual and secular development. His definition of 'karma' included all kinds of good and righteous actions. Traditionally, karma yoga has been considered to lead to Self-knowledge through the purification of the mind. However, Swamiji held that karma yoga takes an aspirant even beyond the purification of the mind.

The ancient teachers taught the four yogas in successive stages. According to some Vedanta scholars, one's spiritual life begins with karma

yoga and ends with jnana yoga. Through *viveka*, discernment, and *vairagya*, renunciation, an aspirant finally realizes the Atman. The other two yogas, raja and bhakti, are optional for the aspirants. Orthodox Vedanta teachers are very particular about jnana yoga because they believe that the practice of jnana alone can lead to Self-realization. Swamiji did not contradict this tradition but viewed it from a different perspective. The mind is naturally constituted by four major faculties—work, meditation, love, and cogitation—the essential elements of the four yogas. Swamiji wanted people to practise an integrated spirituality that includes all the faculties of the mind. This spiritual path would be more natural and practical and hence suitable for many. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order strive to follow a spiritual path that combines all the four yogas.

Swamiji laid emphasis on theistic karma yoga. Though karma yoga may be practised without a belief in God, he was inclined to serve or worship God in living beings through karma yoga. That is why he preferred the terms ‘worship’ and ‘seva’ to karma yoga. This astounding practicality of Advaita opened the eyes of many, who later dedicated their lives to this ideal. Gambhirananda found Swamiji’s ideal of service to be entirely different from the interpretations and meanings of karma yoga given by traditional teachers and called this new path of service ‘seva yoga’.

Swamiji’s heart wept for the poor. He urged his brother-disciple Swami Akhandananda, through several letters from the US, to serve the underprivileged: ‘It is preferable to live on grass for the sake of doing good to others. The Gerua robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner of heroic work. You must give your body, mind, and speech to “the welfare of the world”. You have read ... “Look upon your mother as God,

look upon your father as God”—but I say ... “the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God.” Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.’¹⁷

Swamiji’s Inspiration

One day at Belur Math Swamiji had a wonderful conversation with a disciple who enquired about the reality of the world. Swamiji said: ‘The world has no absolute reality which only belongs to Brahman, which is beyond the reach of mind and speech’ (7.228–9). Then the discussion turned to other topics. The disciple reminded Swamiji that it was the auspicious day of the worship of Mother Kali. Swamiji entered into a profoundly abstracted mood and began to sing songs on the Divine Mother. After he finished singing, he suddenly cried out: ‘This Kali is Brahman in manifestation. Haven’t you heard Shri Ramakrishna’s illustration of the “snake moving and the snake at rest” (representing the dynamic and static aspects of the same thing)?’ (7.229–30).

It was 18 October 1885. Sri Ramakrishna said to Dr Mahendralal Sarkar in the presence of Narendranath, Swamiji’s pre-monastic name: ‘God has become all that you see. It is like a bell-fruit, which consists of three parts: seeds, shell, and flesh. That which is the Absolute has also its relative aspect, and that which is the Relative has also its absolute aspect. You cannot set aside the Absolute and understand just the Relative. And it is only because there is the Relative that you can transcend it step by step and reach the Absolute.’¹⁸ And then he gave the example of the sage Kacha, who, while his mind was coming down from *nirvikalpa* samadhi to the relative plane, said: ‘It is God alone who has become all that I see. I do not know what to accept and what to reject’ (ibid.). Sri Ramakrishna often used to listen to the song: ‘I have joined the heart to Thee:

all that exists art Thou; Thee only have I found, for Thou art all that exists’ (794).

Long before this Narendranath had had the direct experience of Brahman. One day at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna tried to make Narendranath understand the conclusions of Advaita Vedanta without success. Narendranath left the room, and said to Pratapchandra Hazra:

‘How can this be? This jug is God, this cup is God and we too are God: nothing can be more preposterous!’ On hearing Naren’s laughter, Shri Ramakrishna, who was in his room in a state of semi-consciousness, came out ... ‘Hullo! What are you talking about?’ he said smiling. He touched Narendra and plunged into Samadhi. The effect of the touch Naren described as follows: ‘The magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a wonderful change over my mind. I was astounded to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! ... This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy.’¹⁹

Swamiji’s life is the crux of his philosophy. He was

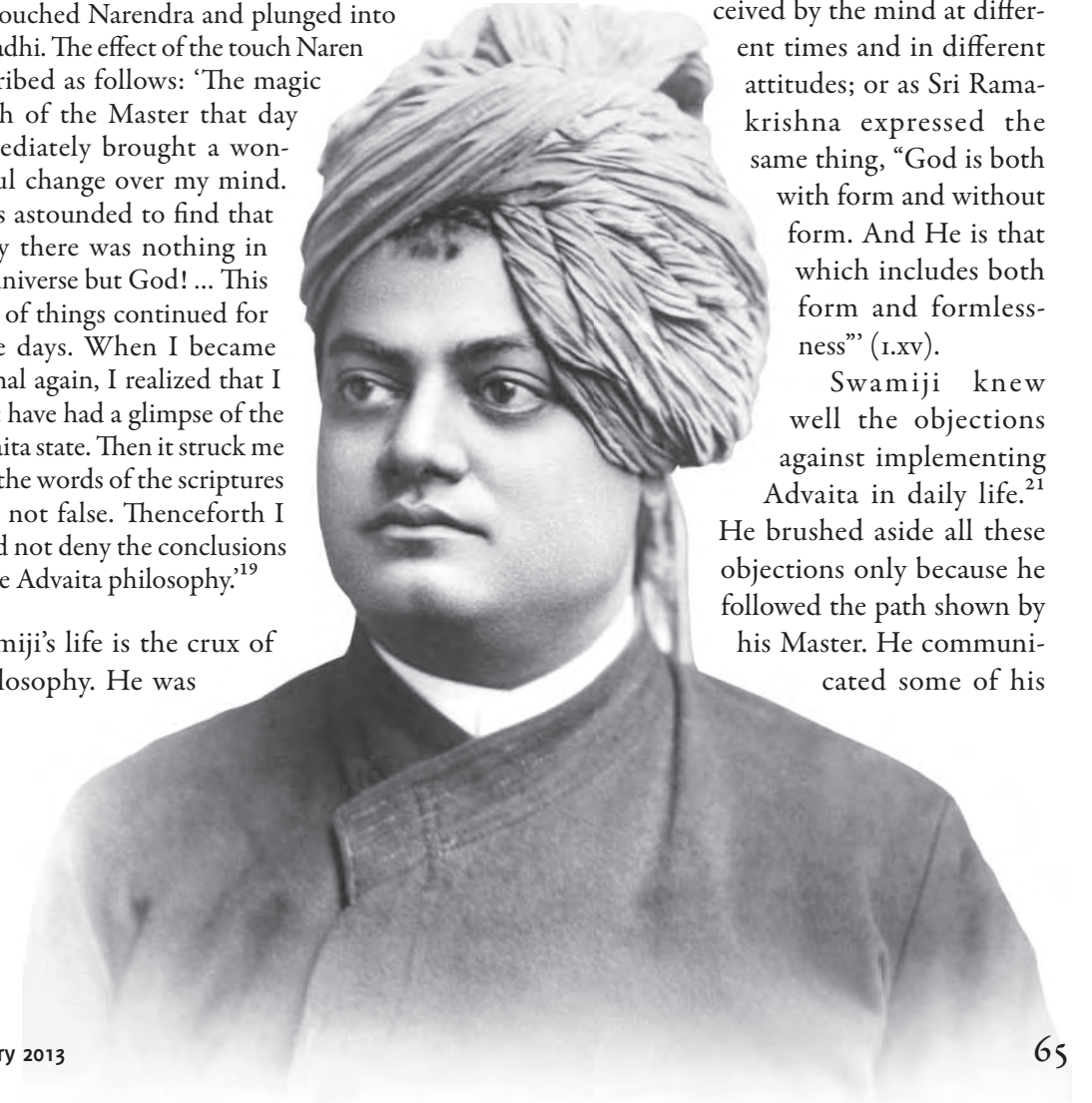
aware of his uniqueness. Once he was asked: “Did Buddha teach that the many was real and the ego unreal, while orthodox Hinduism regards the One as the real, and the many as unreal?” ... “Yes,” answered the Swami. “And what Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this is, that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at different times and in different attitudes.”²⁰

Sister Nivedita, explaining the profundity of the Advaita philosophy and its practicality, said in her unique introduction to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*: ‘The many and the One are the same Reality, per-

ceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes; or as Sri Ramakrishna expressed the same thing, “God is both with form and without form. And He is that which includes both form and formlessness” (1.xv).

Swamiji knew well the objections against implementing Advaita in daily life.²¹

He brushed aside all these objections only because he followed the path shown by his Master. He communicated some of his





ideas to his followers in Madras through a letter on 20 August 1893: 'The Lord has shown me that religion is not in fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines of Paramarthika [absolute] and Vyavaharika [relative].'²²

Swamiji established a new path, seva yoga, as a valid path to liberation. But he was not satisfied with the liberation of individuals alone; he wanted to liberate all humanity. He founded Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and urged all admirers and devotees, lay and monastic, to dedicate themselves for the good of all. He coined the twofold motto of the Order: '*Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*; for one's own liberation and for the good of the world.'

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.253.
2. *Bhagavad Gītā with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2012), xx–xxi.
3. *Complete Works*, 7.112.
4. *Īśā Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 32.
5. *Complete Works*, 7.198.
6. See Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* 4.1.2: '*Na hi dṛṣṭe anupapannam nāma*; nothing is illogical about facts directly perceived.'
7. *Bhagavad Gītā with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya*, 153.
8. See Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*, 2.11: '*Na tat karma yena buddheh samuccayah syāt*; that is no action in which case it could have stood combined with Knowledge.'
9. *Complete Works*, 7.113.
10. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 113–14.
11. *Complete Works*, 6.415.
12. *Bhagavadgita* 4.24.
13. *Complete Works*, 9.379.
14. *Bhagavadgita* 2.47.
15. *Complete Works*, 1.27.
16. *Bhagavadgita* 9.27.
17. *Complete Works*, 6.288.
18. *Gospel*, 851.
19. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2011), 1.96–7.
20. *Complete Works*, 8.261.
21. There is a popular Advaita adage: '*Bhavad-vaitam sada kuryat, kriyadvaitam na karhicit*; practise Advaita always mentally, never practise Advaita in actions.' This is the attitude of the traditional Advaitins.
22. *Complete Works*, 5.15.

Cultural Transference and Swami Vivekananda

Swami Samarpanananda

A LITTLE OVER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO who could have imagined that Swami Vivekananda would be admired and adored today by millions all over the world? Even during his lifetime many famous people—like the scholars Max Müller and Paul Deussen, Sir Hiram Maxim of machine gun fame, philosopher and psychologist William James, scientist and inventor Nikola Tesla, the great actress Sarah Bernhardt, the millionaire Francis Leggett—were impressed and inspired by him. Who could have imagined that even after his passing away this sannyasin would influence Nobel laureates like Romain Rolland? Who could have believed that his ideas would shape the course of the world thought for centuries to come?

There is no doubt that Swamiji's influence over the minds of the rich and poor, literate and illiterate, was possible because of his divine power. But there was another important factor: his unique style of presenting traditional Indian spirituality to people of a different religion, learning, and culture.

This is a perfect example of cultural transference. If Swamiji's divinity generated the power, cultural transference gave his message the necessary direction. If spirituality alone could make a person a successful preacher as Swamiji, then sages like Trailanga Swami and Pavahari Baba could have been equally successful. On the other hand, if mere oration alone was enough, then every religious leader appearing at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago would have been famous. All of them were loudly applauded, but it was only Swamiji who created history. When we look back at that period, we find most of those preachers and their presentations have been forgotten, while Swamiji's name and words are reverberating more than ever before throughout the world.

The style in which Swamiji delivered his talks in the US, England, and India cannot be pigeonholed in any of the known moulds. It requires a new term to describe it, and the best we can think of is 'cultural transference'. The term 'transference' has a special



Swami Samarpanananda is a monk at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur Math.

ART: PORTION OF A PAINTING FROM AJANTA CAVES

connotation in psychology and psychiatry and was extensively used by Sigmund Freud. However, it is now being used in other areas to denote the act of transferring something from one form to another, particularly from the past to the present. In such transference the essence is never lost, but radical changes take place.

Swamiji repeatedly asserted that Vedanta, which was confined to the forests and monasteries, must be brought into the everyday life of the people and be made practical. The wisdom that was held in the hands of a few reticent monks had to be broadcast to all. The required transference, for a different people belonging to a different place and time, needed a divine effort. And that is exactly what Swamiji accomplished. But before we look at the words 'transference' and 'culture' we need to understand the need for cultural transference in the globalized world.

Globalization and Culture

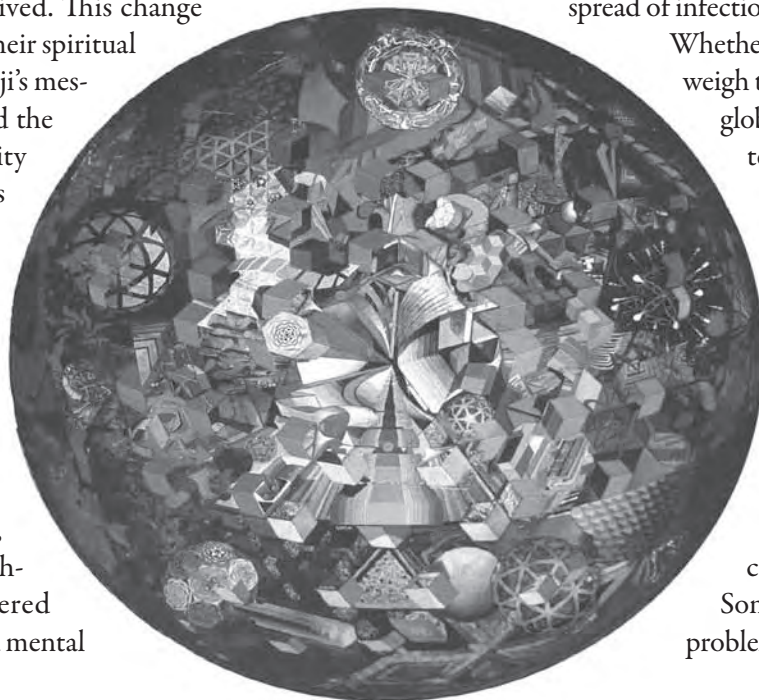
The advent of different prophets is followed by a paradigm shift in the character of the society in which they lived. This change is the result of their spiritual message. Swamiji's message emphasized the divinity and unity of human beings and the spiritual unity of all religions. While Swamiji preached the message of spiritual unity of all life, science and technology discovered the physical and mental

unity through their findings and inventions. The Internet, in recent times, is binding the world in diverse ways. Exclusivity is slowly becoming a forgotten concept and ideal. We think, live, learn, study, eat, market, and do everything globally. We can proudly claim to be the first generation of global citizens.

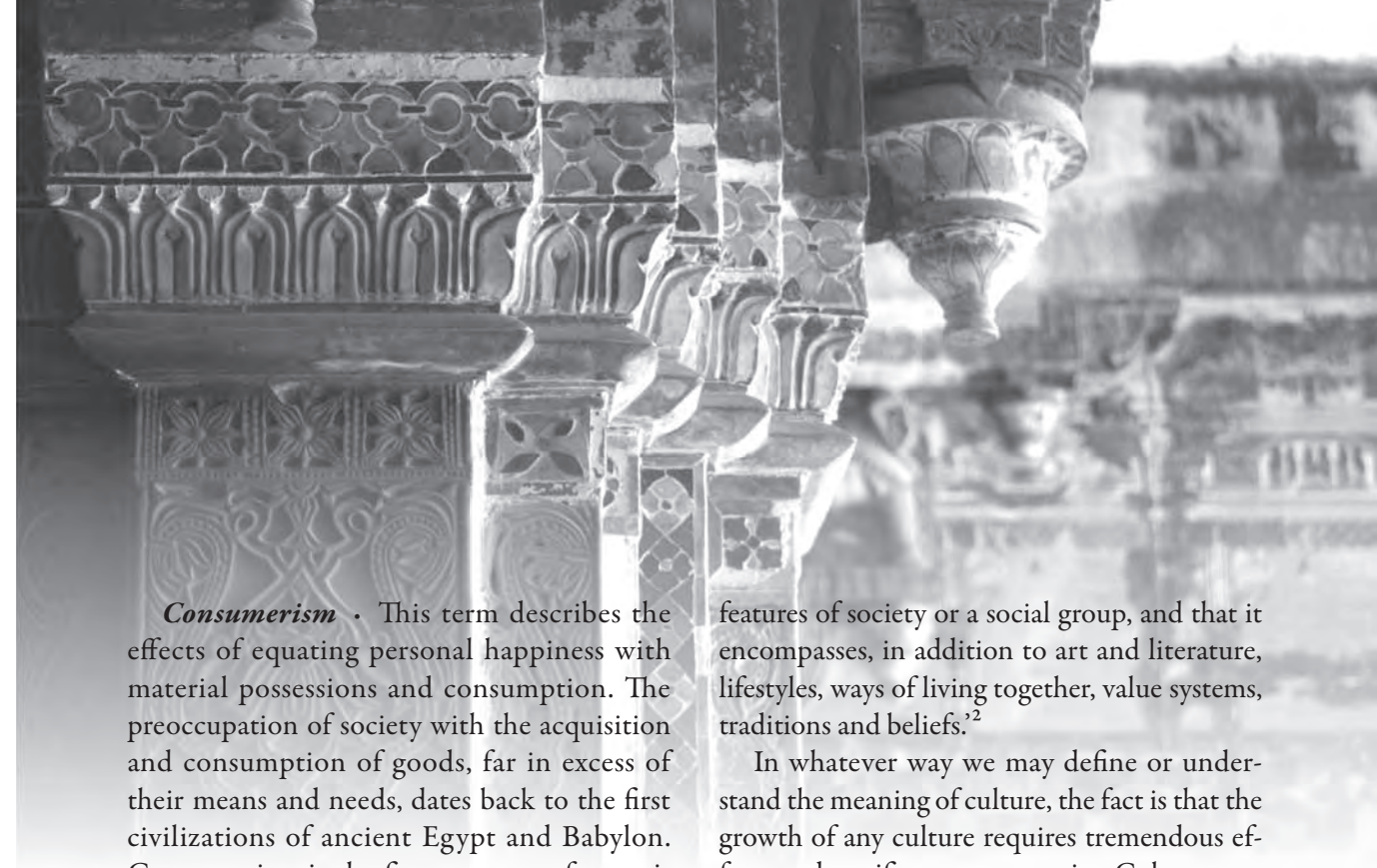
Globalization refers to making the world small and familiar and also to the intensification of global consciousness. The term means the phenomenon of scientific, technological, economic, political, and cultural exchanges brought about by modern communication and transportation. This has opened up national boundaries and societies and helped release the vast human potential, talent, and creativity. Although globalization is not new, it is more pervasive and stronger than before.

Apart from the other ties, cultural ties also grow through globalization. However, some global ties cause severe strain, like ideas of freedom of expression clashing with the views held by orthodox societies and religious groups, or the spread of infectious diseases.

Whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, globalization is an integral fact of the world and is here to stay. Like every new development, globalization has also come with its share of problems, which need quick and correct handling. Some of these major problems are:



ART: 'THE ULTIMATE PAINTING': A COLLABORATIVE WORK BETWEEN CLARK RICHERT, RICHARD KALLWEIT, JOANN BERNOFKY, GENE BERNOFKY AND CHARLES DIJULIO. 1986



Consumerism • This term describes the effects of equating personal happiness with material possessions and consumption. The preoccupation of society with the acquisition and consumption of goods, far in excess of their means and needs, dates back to the first civilizations of ancient Egypt and Babylon. Consumerism is the first progeny of materialism, which found respectability in Greece among the Epicurean philosophers and among the Charvakas in India. By its very nature consumerism is opposed to any kind of spirituality, and in the long run it consumes the consumers. Consumerism became widespread in the twentieth century under the influence of neo-liberal capitalism and globalization.

Indifference to One's Culture • With the thrust of global forces and consumerism the first casualty is the uprooting of indigenous cultures, values, and religious beliefs. Without the restraining force of culture, the senses tend to go wild in the midst of sense objects.

'Culture' is a difficult term to define. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of more than two hundred different definitions of culture in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*.¹ A 1982 document from the UNESCO states that culture is the 'set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional

features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.'²

In whatever way we may define or understand the meaning of culture, the fact is that the growth of any culture requires tremendous efforts and sacrifices over centuries. Culture protects its people from extirpation, gives them an identity, and propels them forward in life. Humanity has progressed fast because of its cultural evolution.

Imitation of other Cultures • A more serious problem caused by globalization is the possibility of picking up wrong practices from other cultures. Each culture is the specific outcome of a people trying to conquer a specific environment. Any culture has to give certain licences to its people to counter some unavoidable problems. These practices may be a taboo in other societies because of a different environment. With the boundaries of specific cultures being broken down, the fear of people picking up the wrong things from a different culture has grown substantially. For example, people of many countries are asserting their freedom of expression without first learning the rigours of responsibility.

Misunderstanding of other Cultures • Except for truly spiritual people, we all suffer from

the problem of the 'missing tile syndrome', according to which our attention is naturally drawn towards the shortcomings of others. Having grown up in various sequestered cultures, it is natural for us to feel shocked at the sudden exposure to alien habits and cultures. Without proper understanding some of these alien traits may appear obnoxious, which in turn adversely affects the concept of global citizenship. Whether we like it or not, one's present and past are exposed to the world, which has every reason to misunderstand and misinterpret one's culture. If one's ways, views, and philosophies are not presented properly, one is ridiculed, which affects one's confidence. This may ultimately lead to the death of a culture. This kind of problem has occurred often in human history, when a powerful race destroyed the culture of a weaker one without realizing its uniqueness.

Cultural Preservation and Transference

'Unity in diversity' is the language of nature and will also be the language of future humanity. Cultural interaction has become a necessity and so there is a need for correctly understanding, preserving, and presenting one's culture. Cultural preservation and transference will be keys to real global citizenship.

To counter consumerism, materialism, superficiality, and other problems mentioned earlier we have to tune ourselves to higher values and learn the modern modes of spirituality. For this age and future ones spirituality must always be coupled with reason and science. When we know that our solar system is more than 4 billion years old and the universe more than 13.7 billion years old, we cannot go on believing in creation myths that say the world is a few thousand years old. Now that we know that life evolves, we cannot believe in spontaneous creation. We cannot believe in the

humbo-jumbo of old witch-doctors and physicians of a bygone era, who looked into their worm-eaten worn-out books to prescribe some dubious concoctions.

Sri Ramakrishna also pointed out that the 'coins current in the time of the Nawabs are not legal tender in that of the Badshas.'³ He gives another example: 'Nowadays the decoctions of roots and herbs of the orthodox Hindu physicians cannot be given to a fever patient. By the time that kind of medicine begins its slow process of curing, the patient is done for. Therefore only a drastic medicine like the allopathic "fever mixture" is effective now.'⁴

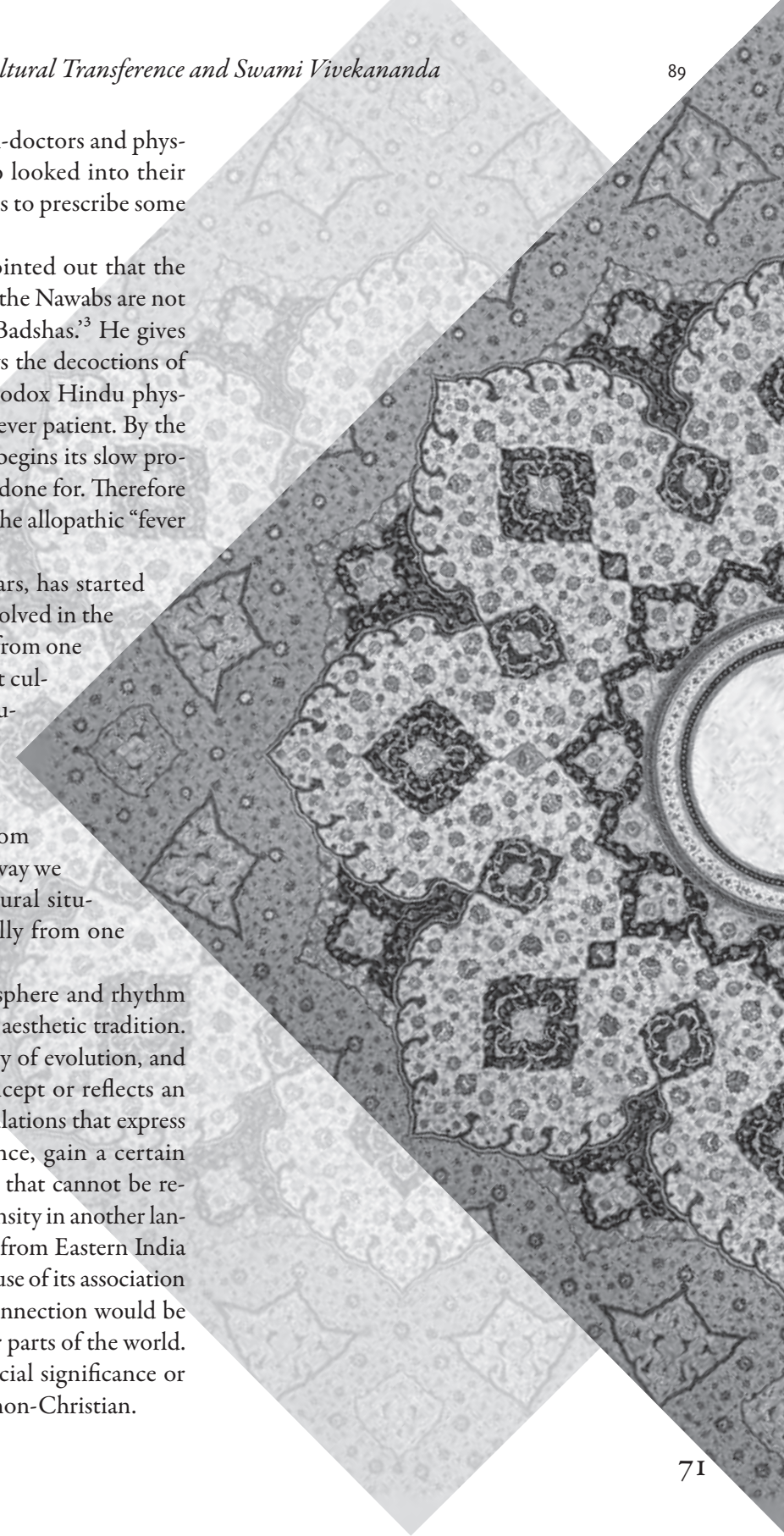
Linguistics, in recent years, has started addressing the problems involved in the transformation of meaning from one culture to another. Different cultures interpret the same situations in different ways. Although human intellectual and emotional needs do not substantially differ from one culture to another, the way we perceive and interpret cultural situations can differ substantially from one language to another.

Words convey the atmosphere and rhythm of a cultural, historical, and aesthetic tradition. Each word has a long history of evolution, and each word represents a concept or reflects an emotional landscape. Formulations that express emotional states, for instance, gain a certain refinement in one language that cannot be reproduced with the same intensity in another language. Thus, when a person from Eastern India talks of *sharat*, autumn, because of its association with the Durga Puja, the connection would be missed by people from other parts of the world. Similarly, Easter has no special significance or evokes no enthusiasm for a non-Christian.

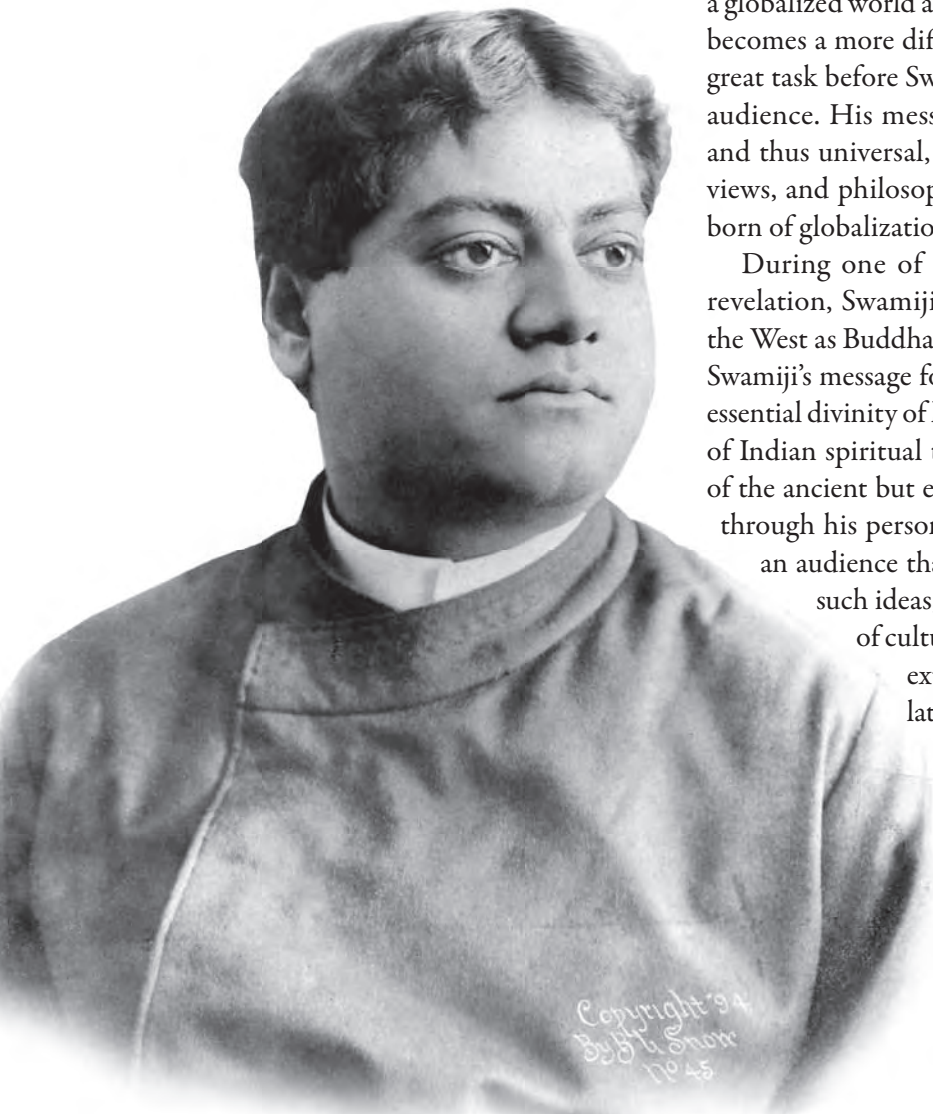


ART: COLLAGE BASED ON AJANTA CAVES PAINTINGS

ART: PORTION OF A MUGHAL SHAMSA (ROSETTE)



Words gain meaning through their associations with other words, through their cultural and historical past, and through their rhythmic and phonetic constructions within a given sentence. So, in the process of presenting an idea before an audience of a different culture, the speaker has to draw information from various disciplines in order to do justice to its specific textual situations. This is the reason why there is always a big onus on cultural ambassadors, whose job requires interpretation—a special skill requiring a good memory—mental stamina, presence of mind, a mastery over the languages, and above all inspiration.



The Prophet of Cultural Transference

We admire the power and greatness of the old prophets and seers, who were the real world movers. These extraordinary people spoke about the nature of Reality and the goal of human life. Today their recorded words are in an archaic language we hardly understand and relate to. That is because language evolves. Later other sages come and interpret the teachings according to the understanding and the needs of the age. This is a kind of cultural transference of spiritual wisdom, from the past to the present, within the same cultural milieu. But when the ancient message has to be renewed and given to a globalized world and to global citizens, then it becomes a more difficult mission. This was the great task before Swamiji: to preach to a global audience. His message was basically spiritual and thus universal, and that is why his words, views, and philosophy neutralize the maladies born of globalization.

During one of his rare moments of self-revelation, Swamiji said: 'I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.'⁵ Swamiji's message for the world focused on the essential divinity of humankind, a cardinal truth of Indian spiritual tradition. The presentation of the ancient but eternal truths, authenticated through his personal spiritual experiences, to an audience that had no prior exposure to such ideas, required a skilled handling of cultural transference through an extraordinary power of translation and interpretation.

When we go through the works of Swamiji, we find his words softly caressing our psyche, hitting us with a deep force, magically lifting us up, gently churning our



Saptarishis

minds, leaving us dazed by its power, and yet soothing and refreshing like the summer rain. What is really mind-boggling is the fact that all these feelings come all at once.

Swamiji's speeches were heavily sprinkled with ideas taken from the then prevalent knowledge of science, sociology, history, and other branches of studies. Whenever possible he used examples from the theory of evolution and electromagnetism. This made his ideas much more acceptable to contemporary minds. Thus we find Nikola Tesla regularly attending Swamiji's lectures in which he was presenting the ideas of *akasha* and *prana*. Had Swamiji stuck to explaining things in a traditional manner, he would have never succeeded in getting such a great inventor to regularly attend his classes.

Swamiji initiated cultural transference by means of a new style of translation and interpretation of Sanskrit texts. He took such liberties with texts that would have seemed sacrilegious to other ordinary gurus. Only a prophet could do what he did. Realizing that equivalence is not an inherent characteristic of translations, Swamiji stayed true to the idea and not to the text.

When he made an impromptu translation of various Sanskrit texts, the words coming out from him were *apta vakyas*, words of a rishi. These translations can be seen as altogether new—as has been commonly believed—or as a case of cultural transference. The result was that these statements became a source of spiritual as well as secular wisdom. The list is long, but we mention some of his famous quotations: 'Sa vidya ya vimuktaye; Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.'⁶ 'Ut-tisthata jagrata prapya varan-nibodhata;⁷ Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.'⁸ 'Tat tvam asi;⁹ Each soul is potentially divine.'¹⁰ 'Amritasya putrah;¹¹ Children of immortal bliss.'¹² 'Kshurasya dhara nishita duratyaya;¹³ The road to the good is the roughest and steepest in the universe.'¹⁴ 'Ihamutrartha phala bhoga viraga;¹⁵ Religion starts with tremendous dissatisfaction with the present state of things, with our lives.'¹⁶

All such translations are unique. For example, when we read, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached', we realize that these words have a very special meaning and thrill our ears and minds. Our hearts seem to resonate with Swamiji, and we cannot stop ourselves from

being inspired and ignited with divine fire. The English words he used are not only the translation of the Sanskrit words of the *Katha Upanishad*, but also carry the explanation thereof. This one quotation can become the guiding motto for anyone who wants to go forward in life—students, workers, executives, and spiritual seekers. While keeping to the essence of the Sanskrit words, Swamiji's translations are unique, sincere, and not mere theological.


Highlighting Swamiji's unique aspect at the Parliament of Religions, Marie Louis Burke writes:

At the more popular sessions of the Parliament, and also later during his tour through the United States, he deliberately couched his message in language as simple and untechnical as possible, for his intention was to reach the people with words and ideas meaningful to all. He was a World Teacher, not a pedant. But when the occasion called for a scholarly presentation of Hinduism, as it did at the Scientific Section, where sharp-minded philosophers, theologians, and scholars came to learn and perhaps to challenge, he very likely gave as much rein to his vast learning as was necessary, both in his talks and in the lengthy and animated discussions that followed.¹⁷

In the past people understood the language of authority, but today's culture has a language of its own. If in the present times religions are losing their influence, it means that they are not speaking the ancient teachings in today's language. This demands cultural transference, as done and shown by Swamiji.

Swamiji's travels all over the world opened the doors, as it were, to many religious and spiritual preachers from India to teach Vedanta. It is found that practically every successful preacher from India was using Swamiji's transference style, albeit unknowingly. Thus we find a huge and growing literature relating Vedanta and its

principles to society, health, success, management, science, and so on.

Swamiji is the prophet for today and tomorrow. When we see his teachings in the light of cultural transference, only then can we understand the true significance of his advent. He is the bridge between the old and the new, the East and the West, between science and spirituality, and above all between individuality and universality. He then appears to us as '*amritasya-asha setub*,' the bridge leading to immortality.¹⁸ 

References

1. Alfred Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn, Wayne Untereiner, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage, 1952).
2. UNESCO, *Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, World Conference on Cultural Policies, Mexico City, 26 July–6 August 1982*, <http://portal.unesco.org/pv_obj_cache/pv_obj_id_A274FC8367592F6CEED-B92E91A93C7AC61740000/file/mexico_en.pdf> accessed 13 November 2012.
3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 465.
4. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 464.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.314.
6. *Complete Works*, 4.358.
7. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.14.
8. *Complete Works*, 2.87.
9. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.9.4.
10. *Complete Works*, 1.124.
11. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 2.5.
12. *Complete Works*, 1.11.
13. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.14.
14. *Complete Works*, 8.383.
15. Sadananda Yogindra, *Vedantasara*, 15.
16. *Complete Works*, 2.123.
17. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992), 1.94.
18. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.5.

Vivekananda: The Bridge between the East and the West

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana

ONE DAY THE DIVINE MOTHER showed Ramakrishna a vision of Keshabchandra Sen and his followers. Keshab was telling his disciples: 'Please listen to what he [meaning the Master] is saying.' Ramakrishna then said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, these people hold the views of "Englishmen". Why should I talk to them?' The Mother replied that 'it would be like this in the Kaliyuga'.¹

Stockpile of Spiritual Power

As Swami Saradananda later said, Ramakrishna understood that everything happens according to the will of the Divine Mother, so he did not get upset about this. Moreover, the Master had earlier 'realized the dearth of spirituality in the world' and had also come to understand that 'the [Divine] Mother's grace had given him a stockpile of extraordinary spiritual power to be used in removing that want'.² Eventually, after talking to Keshab and his followers for a few years, Ramakrishna became familiar with their way of thinking. So when Swami Vivekananda, as the young Narendranath, first came to him, he was not surprised to find that the young man also held such views.

What is amazing though is how Ramakrishna trained this young disciple. And what is also amazing is how Swamiji kept coming back for that training. Two souls so close that they were actually one, yet for all appearances they were so different. In those days

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana is a sannyasini at the Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely, NY.

ART: THE 1907 WORLD MAP BY CARTOGRAPHER MARTIN WALDSEEMULLER ON DISPLAY IN THE JEFFERSON BUILDING OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, USA

Swamiji was inexorable in the way he viewed things. He firmly believed that his Western-like way of thinking was right and the old Indian traditions were wrong—even superstitious.

Yet Ramakrishna never tried to convince Swamiji otherwise. Rather, he always steered him towards another way of looking at things. Thus, when Swamiji's training under the Master was over, Swamiji's Western outlook was not destroyed, but was broadened and deepened by the ancient Indian heritage. This was a heritage that had been lived *in toto* by the Master himself—yet lived with a Western scientific outlook that demanded verification every step of the way. 'Wonderful is the expounder and rare the hearer; rare indeed is the experiencer of Atman taught by an able preceptor.'³

Through his amazing sadhanas and realizations, Ramakrishna had not only proved that God exists and can be realized in a superconscious state, but he had also deepened and expanded

the common notion of what 'religion' is. He had proved that all religious paths—even those of foreigners—were paths to God. He had shown that religion is not just a set of doctrines and dogmas or rituals. It does not lie in a particular scripture or prophet or saviour. Rather, religion is the whole soul yearning for God, yearning to realize its oneness with God. And one may call that God—Him or Her—by whatever name one likes. In India these ideas had been there for thousands of years, but they had become more and more buried under sectarian feuds. What Ramakrishna did was to put the ideas of 'As many faiths, so many paths' and of the divinity of human beings into the subtle thought current through his 'stockpile of extraordinary spiritual power'.

So the ideas were there in the subtle realm, but he needed a person—a 'voice'—to speak those ideas in modern terminology to the science-dominated sceptical world. This 'voice' was Swamiji. And once that voice spoke—once those ideas came out of the subtle realm—what amazing power burst forth! We can probably say that Swamiji also completely changed the way people of the West think about religion. And he did this, not by tearing down people's ideas of religion, but by broadening and deepening them.

Vivekananda's Love for Christ

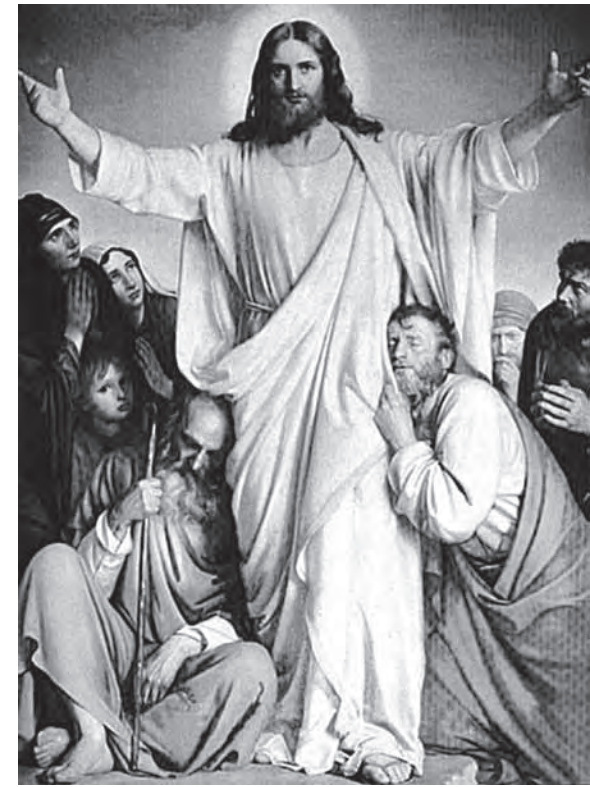
As the people of the West were in those days mainly Christians, Swamiji often built a foundation on his knowledge of Christ and Christ's teachings. In a letter dated 20 August 1893 to Alasinga Perumal—a letter written before the Parliament of Religions convened—Swamiji said: 'Know, then, that this is the land of Christians, and any other influence than that is almost zero. ... I am here amongst the children of the Son of Mary, and the Lord Jesus will help me. They like much the broad views of Hinduism and my love for the Prophet of Nazareth. I tell

them that I preach nothing against the Great One of Galilee. I only ask the Christians to take in the Great Ones of Ind along with the Lord Jesus and they appreciate it.'⁴

Swamiji was, in fact, very devoted to Christ. While he was at the Baranagore Math, he translated part of *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, into Bengali and also wrote some notes and a beautiful introduction to it. He also carried a copy of this book with him when he was on pilgrimage. Once, when asked about his feelings for Jesus, Swamiji replied: 'Had I lived in Palestine, in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, I would have washed his feet, not with my tears, but with my heart's blood' (9.423).

What made him so devoted to Christ? We can possibly get an answer to this question by taking a look at a lecture he gave in Los Angeles in January 1900 entitled 'Christ, the Messenger'. On close examination one might wonder, 'Is Swamiji talking here about Christ or about Ramakrishna?' I think we can truly say that he is talking about both of them, as everything he says fits both. To Swamiji, Christ and Ramakrishna were the same. And just as the disciples of Christ lived with their Master, imbibed his teachings, and received from him divine power to preach his message, so also did Swamiji.

Swamiji's feelings for Christ thus placed him on solid ground in Western countries. After all, who could argue with someone who had such devotion to Christ? And who could argue with someone whose knowledge of the Bible and of Judeo-Christian history was second to none? Yet Swamiji was not blind to the flaws of the Christians of those days—especially to their exclusivism and emphasis on sin. Both of these points he hit upon immediately at the Parliament of Religions and also later, wherever he lectured in the West. And both of these points gave him the leverage he needed to present in detail the



Vedantic conceptions of God, the human being, and religion itself.

But having deep love for Christ was not Swamiji's only qualification for his work in the West. He had, in fact, deep love for all religions. His love was for the essence of religion itself, and it was not hard for those who met him to feel that. As he said, 'If one religion be true, then all the others also must be true' (1.x). Moreover, as mentioned before, his whole mindset was geared towards a Western scientific way of thinking. And he also had an almost insatiable hunger for learning—whether the subject was science, philosophy, poetry, music, or anything else. If we look at Swamiji's 'Paper on Hinduism', delivered at the Parliament of Religions on 19 September 1893, we can see the brilliant way in which he presented Vedantic ideas to the doubting Western mind.

Almost at the very beginning of this talk Swamiji presented the Hindu idea of creation in terms of Western science:



The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation (1.7).

Swamiji then goes on to discuss the Vedantic idea of the human being—that a human being is not the body but the spirit living within the body—and how the idea of reincarnation agrees with science, more so than the theories of heredity and instinct. And along with the idea that the human being is spirit, Swamiji presents the Vedantic idea of the soul being divine: “Children of immortal bliss”—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call man so; it is a standing libel on human nature (1.11).

The Non-dual Aspect of Vedanta

After Swamiji describes some basic tenets of Hinduism—the divinity of the soul, the attainment of liberation, and loving God for love’s sake—he then goes on to explain the non-dual aspect of Vedanta, again in terms of science:

And so when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it would only realise the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. ...

Therefore, to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go. Then alone can death cease when I am one with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself, then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion. Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul.

Science is nothing but the finding of unity (1.13–4).

From the heights of Advaita Swamiji then proceeds to show how all forms of worship—from idolatry to Advaita—are in reality worshipping that one divine Being. Yet, he says, the Hindu does not stop with ‘an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows,’ but rather ‘the whole religion of the Hindu is centred in realisation. Man is to become divine by realising the divine’ (1.16).

And from there Swamiji shows how all religions are true, how they are all leading people to the same goal:

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognised it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. ... The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realised, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols—so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for every one, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism. ...

To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal.

Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them (1.17–8).

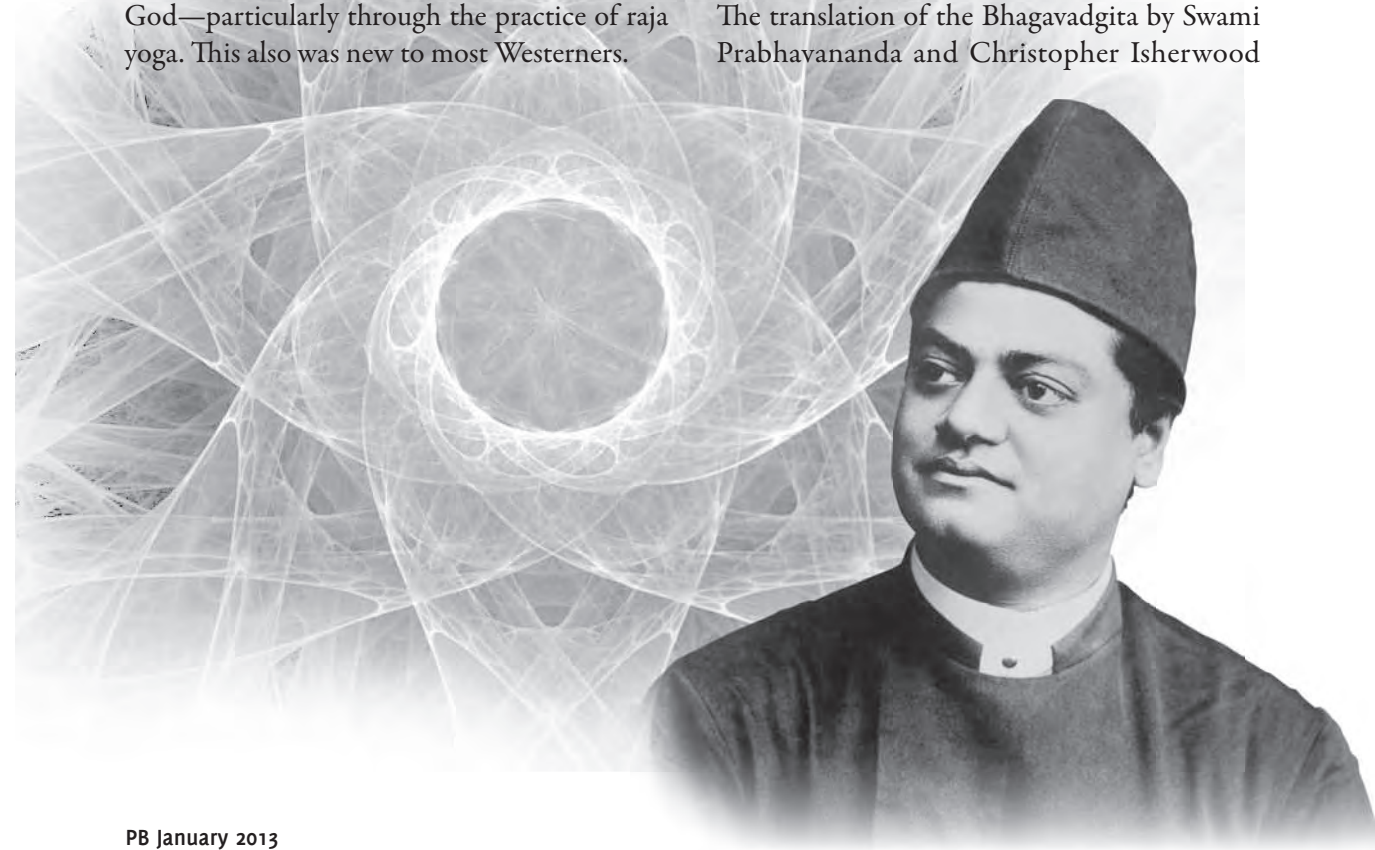
After the Parliament of Religions Swamiji carried on his work in the West in much the same way as he had at the parliament itself. In his lectures he quoted from the Bible as well as from Western science, philosophers, poets, and other writers. And his lectures and classes consisted mainly of introducing the ideas of the divinity of the soul and the existence of one divine Consciousness that pervades the whole universe, as well as promoting the idea that all religions are paths to God. Swamiji knew that if these ideas could enter the minds of the people of the West, then this would be of great benefit to the whole world.

But he added something more in his private classes. There he also introduced the concept of a daily spiritual practice for the realization of God—particularly through the practice of raja yoga. This also was new to most Westerners.

The West after Swamiji

Most likely, no one in the West before Swamiji had attempted to use science to prove conclusions of religion in the way he did. This was new and it was daring. But so also were the many intellectual challenges he threw out to the American people regarding their ideas of religion. And in spite of heavy opposition from some of the clergy, the seeds Swamiji planted fell on fertile ground. Knowingly or unknowingly the American people took it in. Yet for years the seeds lay quietly underneath the surface.

Then came the 1960s. It was as if a whole paradigm shift had suddenly taken place in the West. Everything about India became a fad, and young people flocked there to find enlightenment or a guru or something, they knew not what. Others gathered around the gurus, babajis, swamis, yogis, rishis, lamas, and others, who began settling in every major city of the West. The translation of the Bhagavadgita by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood



sold over a million copies. Religious studies programmes opened up in one university after another—and they included religions of South Asia in their programmes. People were no longer afraid to speak openly of reincarnation, and words like ‘karma’, ‘avatar’, and ‘guru’ began to be used in common parlance. All this seemed to have come out of nowhere. But those who knew of Swamiji understood that the seeds he planted were beginning to sprout.


Since then the scepticism regarding God and religion that had overtaken the West so strongly a hundred years earlier has become hardly an issue. Many are openly acknowledging the divinity within all beings. In fact, ‘we are all one’ seems to be the mantra for this age. People are also taking their relationship with God seriously, whether they are affiliated with a particular religion or not. Rather, they often describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ instead of ‘religious’, as they prefer to go beyond the perceived dividing lines of religion.

Again, inter-religious councils have been convened in almost all the major cities so that people of all faiths can regularly get together and learn about each other’s teachings. Though fundamentalism among many religious groups has become more visible—sometimes taking a violent turn—this is most likely a reaction to the fact that more and more people are becoming liberal in their outlook towards other religions.

And amazingly, Swamiji’s dream that ‘science and religion will meet and shake hands’ (2.140) is, in a sense, literally coming true now with frequent dialogues, seminars, and conferences being held all over the world between scientists, doctors, and religious people. Meditation also is becoming a part of life for many people in the West, though it is not always done for the realization of God. It is even being incorporated into busy work schedules in some companies, as people understand its benefits for the relief of

stress. America takes things in its own way, but it *is* changing. After all, the sprouts are only beginning to come up.

The people of India have long considered Swamiji to be the awakener of India. But those people in the West who know of him feel that he was also the awakener of the West. Swamiji himself said: ‘I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East’ (5.314). More than a hundred years have passed since he first came to the US, and we now find that all the major ideas he preached—the ideas that entered the minds of those fortunate people to whom he spoke—have indeed entered the very thought current of the West. And some people are just now beginning to understand where it all came from.

We have given here a few facets of Swamiji’s philosophy and personality that contributed to his success in the West and made him the perfect ambassador from the East to the West. But there are many more such facets of Swamiji that cannot be covered here. And even if it were possible for all of them to be enumerated, it would still not give us a complete picture of what exactly he did. As with other aspects of the spiritual realm, the sum of all the parts together still does not make a whole. Swamiji himself added something else that was much, much vaster and sublime than what we can possibly fathom. 

References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 831.
2. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), 649.
3. *Katha Upanishad* 1.2.7, in *The Upanishads*, 4 vols, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.133.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.12–13.

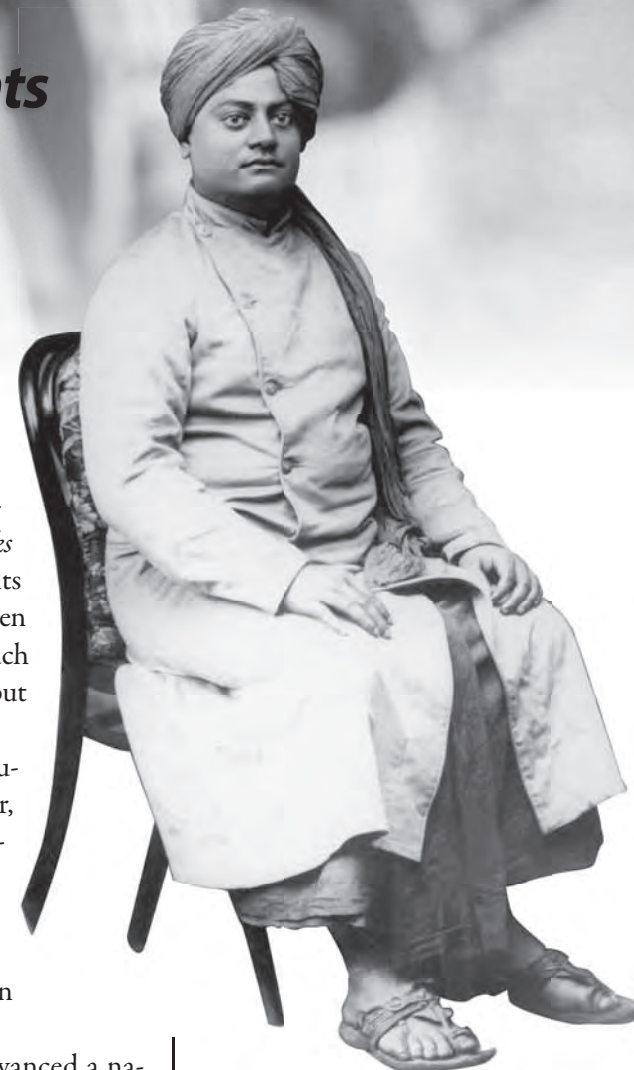
Vivekananda’s Thoughts on Education

Prof. Sumita Roy

THE COMPLETE WORKS of Swami Vivekananda reveal a stupendous mind with an encyclopaedic range, responding insightfully to innumerable human concerns and generating creative parameters for evaluating and improving both age-old and contemporary issues. The vast canvas of the *Complete Works* cannot but leave one impressed and inspired with its sheer sweep and depth. Much has been said and written about Swamiji’s thoughts on various subjects, and much can still be done, not only to analyse and interpret but also to imbibe and implement these thoughts.

Reading Swamiji’s thoughts on education is an education in itself; responding to these thoughts, however, needs a strong character, and to respond to them collectively needs a stronger national character. But if we start implementing some of Swamiji’s thoughts on education, we can build a strong individual and national character, for he did not separate education from character-building and nation-building.

One of the main parameters in judging how advanced a nation is at present, is education or the investment in universal education more than its GDP and other factors that drive economic growth. Swamiji was the first to speak on the necessity of universal



Prof. Sumita Roy teaches English Literature at the Osmania University, Hyderabad.

education and its importance in raising the country and humanity. More than a hundred years ago he said: 'A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses.'¹ Moreover, by declaring that 'education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man' (4.358), Swamiji gave a new orientation to the concept of education and also revealed its hitherto hidden dimension. This goal of perfection—spirituality—should also be universal.

Swamiji has been hailed variously as a prophet, a social reformer, a nationalist-patriot, saint, and so on. But none of these is exclusive—Swamiji is all-in-one and one-in-all. What is inclusive in all his aspects and teachings is the concept of education. Education should help individual and collective progress, for he was at heart a lover of humankind.

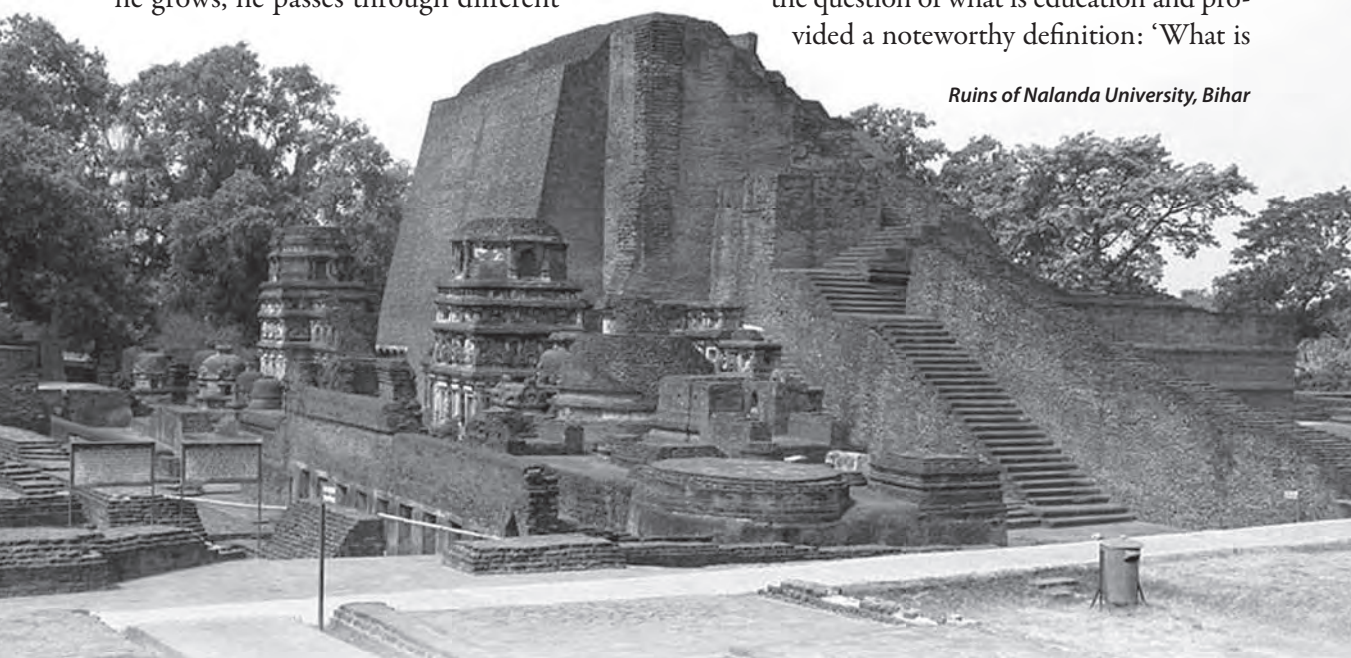
What is Education?

'The child is first the old savage man—and he crushes a butterfly under his feet. The child is at first like the primitive ancestors of his race. As he grows, he passes through different

stages until he reaches the development of his race. Only he does it swiftly and quickly' (2.18). It is through education that every child 'passes through different stages'. A child anywhere in the world is born without culture. Education is the means that a society adopts in order to transmit its values, culture, knowledge, and also mould behaviour. Education eventually guides people to become useful members of society. Another important factor that makes this whole process possible is the capacity of humans to form lasting bonds right from infancy. These bonds help in the transmission of knowledge, first from parents and later from others, and this enables children to grow in culture and knowledge; they, in turn, add something to the received knowledge and transmit it to future generations.

Apart from what children receive Swamiji wanted an all-round education that would equally develop the body, mind, and spirit. His ideas seemed radical then, but now they are found to be precise and with far-reaching consequences. In a particular context Swamiji himself raised the question of what is education and provided a noteworthy definition: 'What is

Ruins of Nalanda University, Bihar



education? Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education' (4.490). It is obvious that here Swamiji is making a clear distinction between literacy and education. And in this he had the living example of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, who though almost 'unlettered' could be considered more educated than renowned scholars. Therefore, when Swamiji said: 'You consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures. The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion—is it worth the name?' (7.147). It is a clear sign that education should be comprehensive and the essential components of the personality should not be neglected. Educators and legislators, more than a century after Swamiji's message, are beginning to understand the importance of developing the inner person. Mere information or knowledge that is not pragmatic is not education. Only knowledge that matures into wisdom and inculcates the skills for living and develops the proper attitude to make the best of these skills should be the objective of education. In an ironic vein Swamiji said: 'If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopaedias are the Rishis' (3.302).

Garnering his ideas from extensive travels across India and the world, Swamiji saw the results of education and compared the Indian situation with that of the West: 'Through education comes faith in one's own Self, and through faith in one's own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant' (4.483). In these and numerous other instances Swamiji spelt out what education should do, what it is actually doing, what should be avoided, and what should be encouraged.

The Educational System

Lamenting about the contemporary system of education Swamiji said: 'The education that our boys receive is very negative. The schoolboy learns nothing, but has everything of his own broken down—want of Shraddha is the result' (4.483–4). Swamiji's genuine and continuing concern was with the right kind of education; it made him often spell out what he considered negative education. He once thundered in strong words: 'The education you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptics. You are working like machines merely, and living a jelly-fish existence' (7.148).

In another context he questioned: 'Is that education as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone new ones, are disappearing one by one; is that education

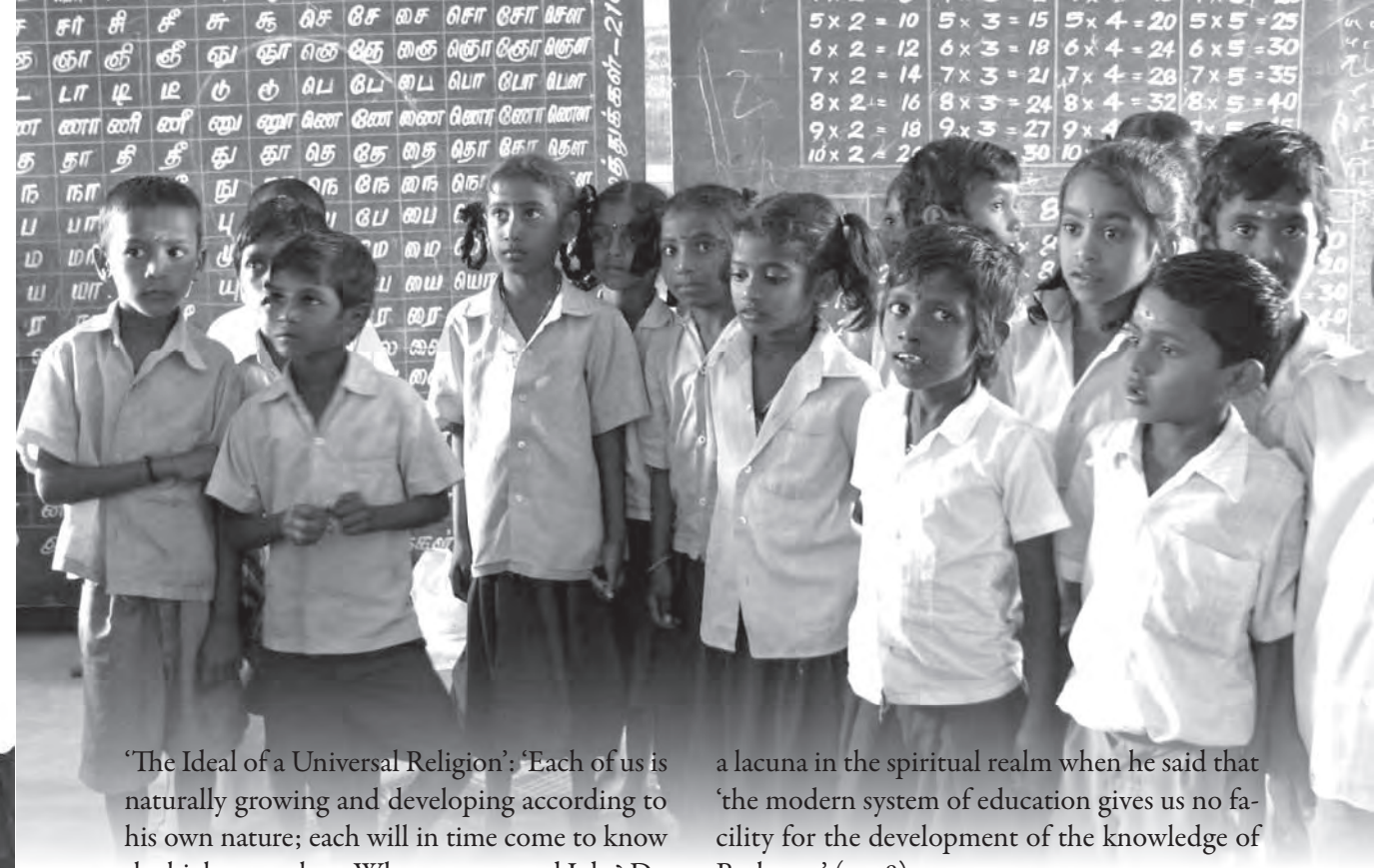
which is slowly making man a machine?’ (4.490). After this significant declaration, he added: ‘It is more blessed, in my opinion, even to go wrong, impelled by one’s free will and intelligence than to be good as an automaton’ (ibid.).

The human being is, therefore, human not because of its physiological or genetic make-up, but because of the influence of education. In today’s popular mass culture, where everyone wants to do as one’s neighbour does, education only produces ‘automatons’, as he spelt out in no uncertain terms. And today this is a matter of deep concern—children are made to mindlessly engage themselves in learning by rote lessons that may get them full marks but leave them totally maladjusted to life.

Regarding the transmission of knowledge, education is an interaction between the teacher and the taught. There is no room to feel superior or inferior, for both the teachers as well as the students learn. Education itself has undergone remarkable changes. The old system of education was teacher-centred; it then became textbook-centred; now it is student-centred. Computers and the Internet have revolutionized how teachers teach and students study—education and learning has spilled out of classrooms and textbooks. The tremendous upsurge of information and knowledge is available, mostly free, to anyone. Distance education is now an established system that has enabled not only students but also people in far-flung areas to access knowledge.

But in spite of all these developments the basic principle of education—that all knowledge is

inherent in us like fire in the flint, as pointed out by Swamiji—remains unchanged. The role of a good teacher is to remove the obstacles by providing a suitable environment for knowledge to manifest. Swamiji made this point in his lecture



‘The Ideal of a Universal Religion’: ‘Each of us is naturally growing and developing according to his own nature; each will in time come to know the highest truth. ... What can you and I do? Do you think you can teach even a child? You cannot. The child teaches himself. Your duty is to afford opportunities and to remove obstacles. A plant grows. Do *you* make the plant grow? ... What can an external teacher do? He can remove the obstructions a little, and there his duty ends’ (2.385).

Swamiji said that a real teacher should ‘not teach with any ulterior motive, for name, or fame, or anything else, but simply for love, pure love for you’ (4.27). From time immemorial teachers have been deeply revered in every culture. Of course, Swamiji’s prescription is not for teachers alone. An ideal teacher would need a worthy pupil, as he suggested: ‘The conditions necessary in the taught are purity, a real thirst for knowledge, and perseverance’ (4.24). These three crucial requirements, if met, would certainly ensure excellence in education, irrespective of curricular flaws.

In addition to this list of basic requirements that education should supply, Swamiji also noted

a lacuna in the spiritual realm when he said that ‘the modern system of education gives us no facility for the development of the knowledge of Brahman’ (7.158).


Blueprint for the Future

Education for everyone was Swamiji’s lifelong concern. In ‘Modern India’ he foresaw the future needs of a free and democratic India, where there would be rapid demographic changes. The kind of education he suggested would solve many of today’s pressing problems without having to take recourse to legislative reforms or other measures. If people learn to unite for a worthy cause, if everyone selflessly considers the common good, if everyone uses one’s intellect to ensure that rights are distributed among all, and not only to a privileged few, it would revolutionize the educational system of India. In today’s world every society has woken up to the idea of free and universal education, which has the capacity to eradicate ignorance, poverty, and exploitation. Education brings a qualitative change in the community’s life as well as dignity and self-confidence. Swamiji stated this concept in lucid

terms: 'The ideal of all education, all training, should be this man-making. But, instead of that, we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow' (2.15).

When Swamiji articulated his ideas on education India was not politically free to fashion its own educational curriculum; today this barrier has been removed. The indigenous educational system of India had disappeared after the Mughal conquest, except for the *pathashalas*, village schools that used to teach mainly the Smritis. Later, after the British consolidated their dominion in India, they established schools and colleges to create, in general, a class of people with clerical abilities who could take care of the daily running of the empire. Not much could be expected from this system. At the time of India's independence almost the whole nation, with its huge population of millions upon millions, was illiterate. For the last six and a half decades it has been an uphill

struggle of independent India to bring education to everyone. Now that there is some stability and legislation to ensure free education to children, including free midday meals, India has to fine-tune its educational system. This is the time when Swamiji's thoughts will act as a gear lever. And this is the time for educators, and all those connected with education, to rethink the aims and objectives of education.

Swamiji's ideas on education are not just applicable to India and other developing countries, but are also relevant to the whole world, for all through the *Complete Works* we find him speaking about awakening people to the infinite Reality present in them. This was his life's work. And because right education would be the most suitable path to this goal for this age, he constantly emphasized its ideals and importance. 

Reference

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.482.

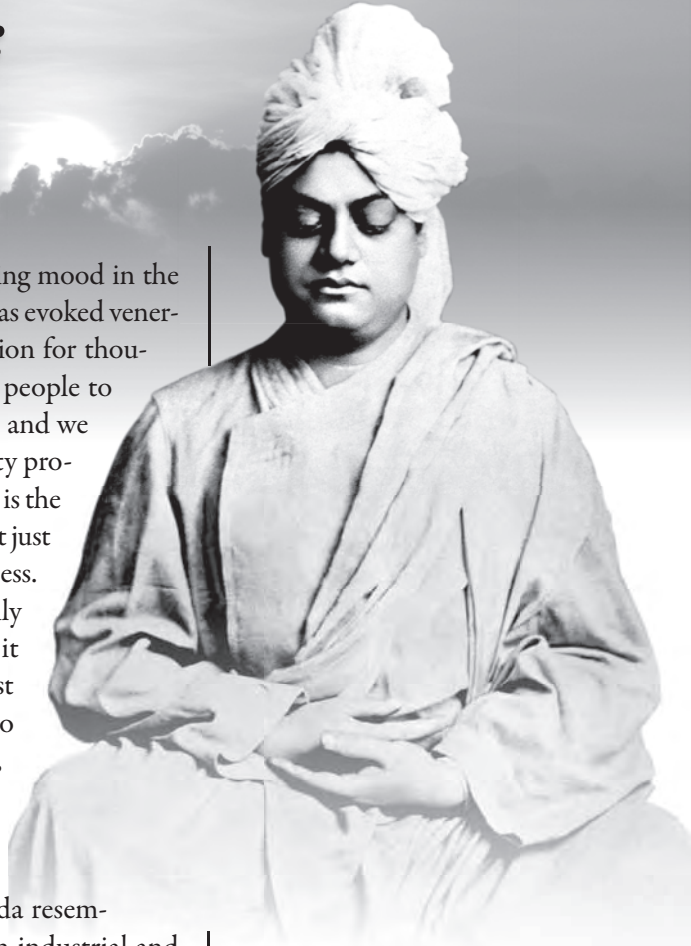


Meditation and Yoga: Face of the Future

Swami Satyamayananda

AN EXTERNAL IMAGE EVOKES a corresponding mood in the perceiver's mind. One sublime image that has evoked veneration, joy, courage, peace, and introspection for thousands of years is that of Buddha. It is natural for people to build monuments to remember his achievements, and we find scores of them all over the world. As humanity progresses, it understands that its greatest achievement is the supremely meditative face of Buddha. Buddha is not just a god, statue, or a picture; it is a state of consciousness. His personality, life, and teachings helped peacefully spread noble ideas to the whole of Asia, changing it culturally and spiritually. He is today one of the most recognizable and revered icons of humanity. Two thousand five hundred years after Buddha's birth, the ancient warrior races and nations are slowly replacing their old icons of muscular heroes wielding weapons with sublime meditation figures.

Many people noticed that Swami Vivekananda resembled Buddha. Sir Jamsetji Tata, the founder of an industrial and commercial conglomerate 'once told Sister Nivedita: when the Swami was in Japan, everyone who saw him was struck by his likeness to Buddha.'¹ The *London Daily Chronicle* wrote: 'Vivekananda, the popular Hindu monk, whose physiognomy bore the most striking resemblance to the classic face of Buddha, denounced our commercial prosperity, our bloody wars, and our religious intolerance, declaring that at such a price the mild Hindu would have none of our vaunted civilization' (2.46). Swamiji's resemblance to Buddha was more pronounced while meditating and also in his well-known meditation picture. It was Swamiji who brought yoga and meditation to the West. He once declared:



Swami Satyamayananda is the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.



Golden Buddha at Namdroling Tibetan Monastery Bylakuppe, Karnataka

'I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.'² Today, due to globalization, there are many common areas of interest and interaction between different people and nations, but meditation and yoga are spreading like wildfire. The sublime feeling of timelessness, seen in the faces of these Master yogis, makes us yearn to experience what they did.

The Characteristic of the Age

Humankind has advanced more rapidly through art, music, literature, travel, exploration, science,

and philosophy than through wars, diplomacy, cunning, and crime. Over thousands of years we have been continuously redesigning and reinventing ourselves to survive nature's challenges. The capacity to do this has been principally of the mind. Today, with the various crises facing humanity—one of which is global climate change—meditation and yoga offer a truly remarkable solution for reinventing ourselves for global peace and progress. Human intelligence and ingenuity have advanced to a point where we are no longer pushed by nature but participate with her to reap

tremendous benefits. Meditation and yoga also protect us from misusing these benefits, making them available to all people. The mind accelerates our spiritual evolution so that we can finally become living gods.

It is obvious that humanity has understood the importance of mental health over physical well-being and social progress. It has also understood that pugnacity and violence have no place in human progress, and that the future will be defined by peace, cooperation, and interaction. The future will thus see the dominance of mind over matter.

This age can be called the age of the mind, for we are discovering many of its secrets, dimensions, and powers. There was a time when nature, and we, designed huge bodies with brawn in order to survive those violent times. As the need for huge bodies is diminishing, nature is compensating us with remarkable minds. The explosion of knowledge everywhere is one of the results of this mental development.

The body and the brain are malleable and can be transformed. Thoughts, learning, and culture sculpt the brain. The most powerful sculptors of the brain and mind are meditation and yoga. They can quickly and permanently alter the body and brain in a healthy way and make it ready it for higher consciousness to manifest. A healthy brain altered by meditation also influences others through peace, love, and joy. Such brains and minds change society for the better. As humankind is entering vast mental realms, contemplative people will predominate over busy people. We have already begun to use our thoughts to cure phobias, quicken the body's curative powers, and do a host of other things. We can move paralysed limbs, make the brain perceive even without the senses—aided with sophisticated machines and computers—and do a lot of things that border on science fiction.

The New Wave

There is a kind of collective neurosis affecting people all over the world. This neurosis is reflected in literature, art, music, cinema, relationships, and so on. As society becomes more developed, so is life getting more restless and more disengaged with reality. The mind has become disintegrated and directionless. Society and life in the past seem to have been more ordered. Is the mind, spoken so highly of, ready for meditation and yoga? It looks unlikely. No doubt this neurosis is a sign of something going wrong at the basic level of the human psyche, but this is what is pushing us on to meditation and yoga. The proliferation of these means has come at a crucial time in human history. Otherwise, equipped with enormous mental power and achievements, humanity might implode and destroy itself. Meditation and yoga have the capacity to channel these mental forces and take us to the next level of development. One is tempted here to assume that the Divine—working through Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swamiji—had kept ready the antidote in advance in order to cure individual and social ills.

The active West, characterized as courageous and powerful, has taken up meditation and yoga in its usual proactive way, and that is why yoga is all the rage in the Americas and Europe. Many pundits, who assumed that this was another passing fad, have been proven wrong. Any real cultural shift takes a very long time to crystallize, and the present shift has taken fifty to hundred years. This shift should not be seen as the cultural influence of the contemplative East on the active West, but as humanity trying to find its equilibrium. There is a cultural shift even in the East that is harmonizing activity with contemplation. This is what Buddha and Swamiji preached.

The contemplative philosophies and the meditative practices of the East were long derided as lazy and morbid. It was 'doing' that people wanted and considered progressive. It was dynamic activity that showed how humankind ascends to higher levels of civilization. What constitutes 'development' was not clear, yet many people believed that meditation and all such things would arrest that ascent. Today there is an increase in the right understanding of contemplative practices and principles thanks to Swamiji, who toured extensively and preached the correct science of yoga. Too much 'doing' without meditation has taken individual life on a retrograde trajectory. 'Development' exploited the weak and destroyed nations, and when it started destroying the 'doers', then it dawned that there is something wrong with this attitude. This disengagement from excessive doing needed the support of 'being', and that is meditation and yoga.

For the last fifty years or more yogis and preachers from the East have found a ready field for teaching contemplation in the West. The harvest was bountiful. There has also been a flow of people from the West to the East who came for spirituality and carried it back home and preached it successfully. Not only did the West see cultural changes but there was a great revival of meditation and yoga in the East as well. All types of gurus and preachers in India successfully taught simple asanas and meditation, which attracted people in droves. People all over the world were caught up in a wave of yoga. Initially, for many it was yoga for health and fitness, but now people are approaching its core: spirituality. The need for spirituality is another factor that is helping the yoga wave. There is a big distinction between religion and spirituality, beliefs and practices, and yoga is bridging this divide.

Renewal of an Ancient Science

When Swamiji went to the West the words 'yoga' and 'yogi' were associated with queer ideas of powers, miracles, physical contortions, lying on a bed of nails, being immune to the extremes of heat, cold, pain, and so on, and even levitation. The famous Indian rope-trick was associated with yogis with supernatural powers. Alexander the Great, after his invasion of India, encountered yoga and became impressed after meeting some yogis. However many misconceptions remained, even in India and the rest of the East. People wanted cures, know their future, avert some bad luck, and become prosperous. Yogic practices thus attracted the insincere and the fraudulent. Some yogis with slight powers hoodwinked the gullible. Sri Krishna had come earlier and revived to its pristine form the ancient yoga, which had become corrupted due to a long lapse of time.³ So also in this age Sri Ramakrishna, through Swamiji, revived yoga's correct scientific principles and practices. Yoga and meditation were now unyoked from all dross and superstitions to be used for the good of humanity. They showed that each person was potentially a yogi or yogini.

Swamiji made yoga rational and harmonized its teachings with the latest knowledge of physiology, psychology, and science. By bringing in the schools of Vedanta and Tantra he made yoga comprehensive. Besides, he also brought in the elements of karma, jnana, and bhakti into its methodology. Thus, all the ancient and modern streams of knowledge and practices were fused into making the ancient yoga philosophy ideal for modern humans. He removed all mystery, secrecy, and rites surrounding yoga and preached it rationally. No longer was there a need for a cave, forest, temple, or any isolated place. Meditation and yoga could be done at home, at work, at any time and place, and by any person.

This is the second time that the ancient practices of yoga were harmonized for the good of the world. Yoga and meditation have a very long history in India. Different yogis experimented with the mind differently and came up with new methods, but these were kept secret in their respective sects. Patanjali, the great yogi, strung together some of the authentic practices systematically and formed the classic *Yoga Sutra*. In this age the great yogi Swamiji, though born a *dhyana-siddha*, perfect in meditation, learnt from Sri Ramakrishna about many high states of yoga and preached it to the world.

There is an unprecedented explosion of knowledge. No one person can be an expert in all fields and no person can be an expert in one particular field. One branch of knowledge, for instance medicine, has split into thousands of branches, and besides doctors, other professionals like engineers, chemists, biologists, and so on are active in the field of medicine. Such multidisciplinary phenomenon is found in all areas. As knowledge progresses in a particular line, after a few years, it splits into numerous branches. Experts get into each branch and this again splits into more branches and so on. However, all knowledge is interconnected and it has expanded the human mind. All knowledge is internal and is drawing minds towards its core—that is consciousness.

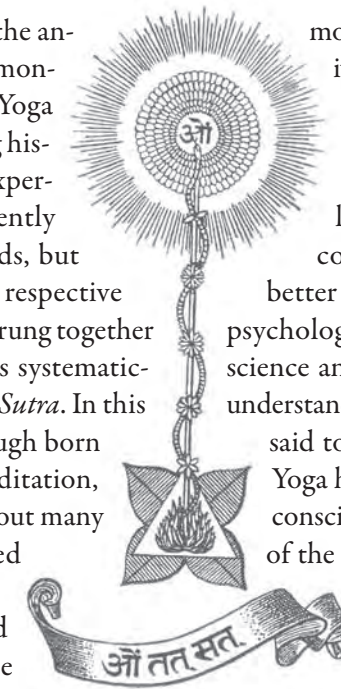
Internalization has become a byword everywhere. It is not just unconscious assimilation or making attitudes and behaviour part of one's nature, but internalizing all objects. Yoga teaches that there is one substance of varying density in the universe. Consciousness, concepts, words, and objects are different phases of that single substance. Internalization has made humans gravitate

more towards the mental than the objective world. This orientation is also one of the reasons why yoga is necessary.

In the past the study of consciousness was strictly the domain of religion. It was called the soul. The conceptions of consciousness became better with the philosophers and with the psychologists who followed them. Now it is science and all related fields that are trying to understand consciousness. All knowledge can be said to be trying to discover consciousness. Yoga had since long cracked the problem of consciousness and showed it to be the core of the individual and of the universe. However, there are various levels of consciousness, and one needs to travel to its highest point in *nirvikalpa samadhi*. This is where yoga psychology and philosophy become useful in better understanding human knowledge, the individual, and the universe.

Humanity in the Future

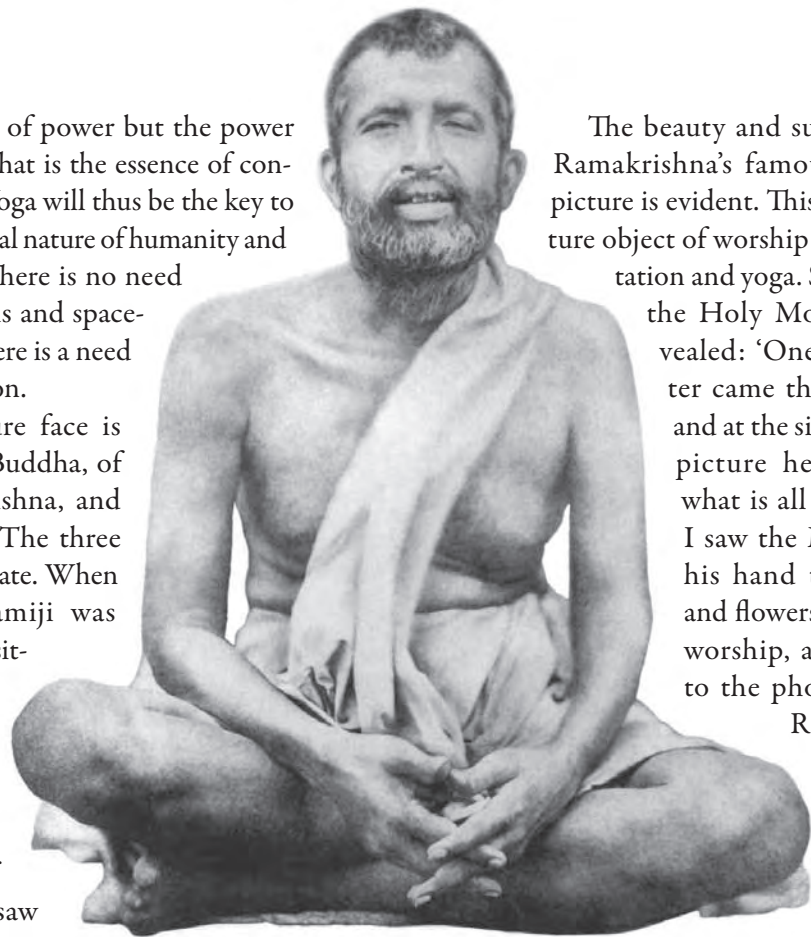
If we were to imagine the face of a future humanity, we would visualize it as meditative like that of Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swamiji. All science fiction conceptions of space travel and aliens are based on the old cultural ideology of conquest and dominion. This was what nations did in the past. All ideas of external conquests will be history as the old paradigms are replaced by the paradigm of meditation and yoga. The greatest conquest is the conquest of the mind. As we become experts in this age of the mind, humanity will mature quickly. Physically, we know that materials found in the whole universe are also present in us. Mentally, we know we are connected to all minds, for life is not individual but cosmic. The conquest of ourselves gives us the power over the whole of nature; not



the old type of power but the power of love, for that is the essence of consciousness. Yoga will thus be the key to unlock the real nature of humanity and the world. There is no need for laser guns and space-ships, but there is a need for meditation.

The future face is the face of Buddha, of Sri Ramakrishna, and of Swamiji. The three are not separate. When young, Swamiji was one day still sitting on his asana after meditation at his home when he had the vision of Buddha. 'I saw the extraordinary

figure of a monk appear suddenly ... and stand before me at a little distance filling the room with a divine effulgence. He was in ochre cloth with a Kamandalu in his hand. His face bore such a calm and serene expression of inwardness born of indifference to all things that I was amazed and felt much drawn towards him. He walked forward towards me with a slow step with his eyes steadfastly fixed on me, as if he wanted to say something.'⁴ Thus began Swamiji's lifelong association and attraction for Buddha. Another powerful factor that contributed to Swamiji's 'veneration for Buddha was, to quote Sister Nivedita's words, "the spectacle of the constant tallying of his own Master's life, lived before his eyes, with this world-attested story of twenty-five centuries before. In Buddha he saw Ramakrishna Paramahansa: in Ramakrishna he saw Buddha".'⁵



The beauty and sublimity of Sri Ramakrishna's famous meditation picture is evident. This will be the future object of worship through meditation and yoga. Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother once revealed: 'One day the Master came there [Nahabat] and at the sight of the [his] picture he said "Hallo, what is all this?" ... Then I saw the Master take in his hand the Bel leaves and flowers kept there for worship, and offer them to the photograph.'⁶ Sri Ramakrishna, on looking at his picture remarked: 'This represents a high yogic state.

This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on.'⁷

References

1. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.398.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.314.
3. Bhagavadgita, 4.1-2.
4. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 1134-5.
5. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.545.
6. Her Devotee-Children, *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2012), 96.
7. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 468.

PHOTO: ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO, WHERE THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS WAS HELD IN 1893

Vivekananda's Impact on American Spirituality

Pravrajika Brahmaprana

ON 8 NOVEMBER 2010 United States President Barack Obama addressed the Indian Parliament:

Instead of succumbing to division, you have shown that the strength of India—the very idea of India—is its embrace of all colors, all castes, all creeds. [Applause.] It's the diversity represented in this chamber today. It's the richness of faiths celebrated by a visitor to my hometown of Chicago more than a century ago—the renowned Swami Vivekananda. He said that, 'holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.'¹

Swami Vivekananda's words are as soul-stirring today as they were in 1893, a significant testament to his impact on America.

'I Form no Sect'

Over a hundred years ago Americans were taken by surprise when this foreigner aroused and inspired them with the message of their innate divinity, the goal of God-realization, the unity of existence, and the harmony of religions. At the end of the swami's message a stampede of women climbed across the parliament benches just to get closer to the man of God who had uttered it. Such was Vivekananda's impact that in 1976 the Smithsonian Institution recognized the swami as one of twenty-nine eminent foreign visitors, who at the 1893 Parliament of Religions 'charmed audiences with his magical oratory, and left an indelible mark on America's spiritual development.'²

Pravrajika Brahmaprana is the resident minister of Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of North Texas.



What are some of the signs of that mark? First of all, Vedanta is in America to stay. 'As an Oriental religious group preaching an alien message in an often hostile environment,' historian Carl Jackson explained, 'this has been a considerable achievement.'³

Most new religious movements collapse within a single generation. [However, the Vedanta Movement] has established firm foundations and is today in more flourishing condition than it has ever been. It has won increasing public acceptance, integrated a far-reaching movement and found necessary channels to the outside public (ibid.).

How did a non-indigenous religious tradition become a visible and successfully integrated presence in a predominantly Judeo-Christian country? In a 1 October 2011 *New York Times* article 'How Yoga Won the West,' Anne Bardach explained how Vivekananda's magnetic personality and spellbinding message of the divinity of the soul captivated Americans as he lectured the length and breadth of the Yankee land. And along with that, Vivekananda's 'prescription for life was simple, and perfectly American: "work and worship".'⁴

However, Americans' attraction to this modern-day rishi lays not only in Vivekananda's powerful delivery, nor even in his message of God-realization and the practical methods to attain it. During the swami's 'Address at the Final Session' of the Parliament, Americans heard for the first time the peace-giving truth of religious harmony—a message that would sweep across their land well into the twenty-first century: 'Do I wish that the Christian would become a Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu

or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. ... But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.'⁵

For Americans this was an altogether non-proselytizing and, therefore, non-threatening invitation

to open their hearts and minds to an ancient non-sectarian tradition and drink in its unadulterated waters of spirituality. In so doing, they had nothing to lose, yet everything to gain. Is it any wonder that Vivekananda is recognized for his 'significant contribution to the understanding of Vedanta in the Western world?'⁶

Because Vivekananda founded his American roots as 'Vedanta'—rather than the more culturally-loaded term 'Hindu'—Societies, Westerners were able to resist their knee-jerk reaction to reject what was too foreign-sounding and therefore alien. 'I form no sect, nor organization,' Vivekananda promised.⁷ Instead, his Western mission was clear from the start: 'I propound a philosophy which can serve as a basis to every possible religious system in the world,'⁸ which in America at that time spoke to Christians and Jews.

Furthermore, by publishing his four yogas, Vivekananda answered America's need to explore the essence of Vedanta in a language they could understand. And thus, as the swami prophesied, his written works would 'make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds' (5.104). In fact, after Vivekananda's Harvard lecture in 1896, William James and his colleagues invited the turbaned monk to chair Harvard's new

department, an invitation that was promptly followed by Columbia University's own offer. But due to his vows of renunciation, Vivekananda declined them both.

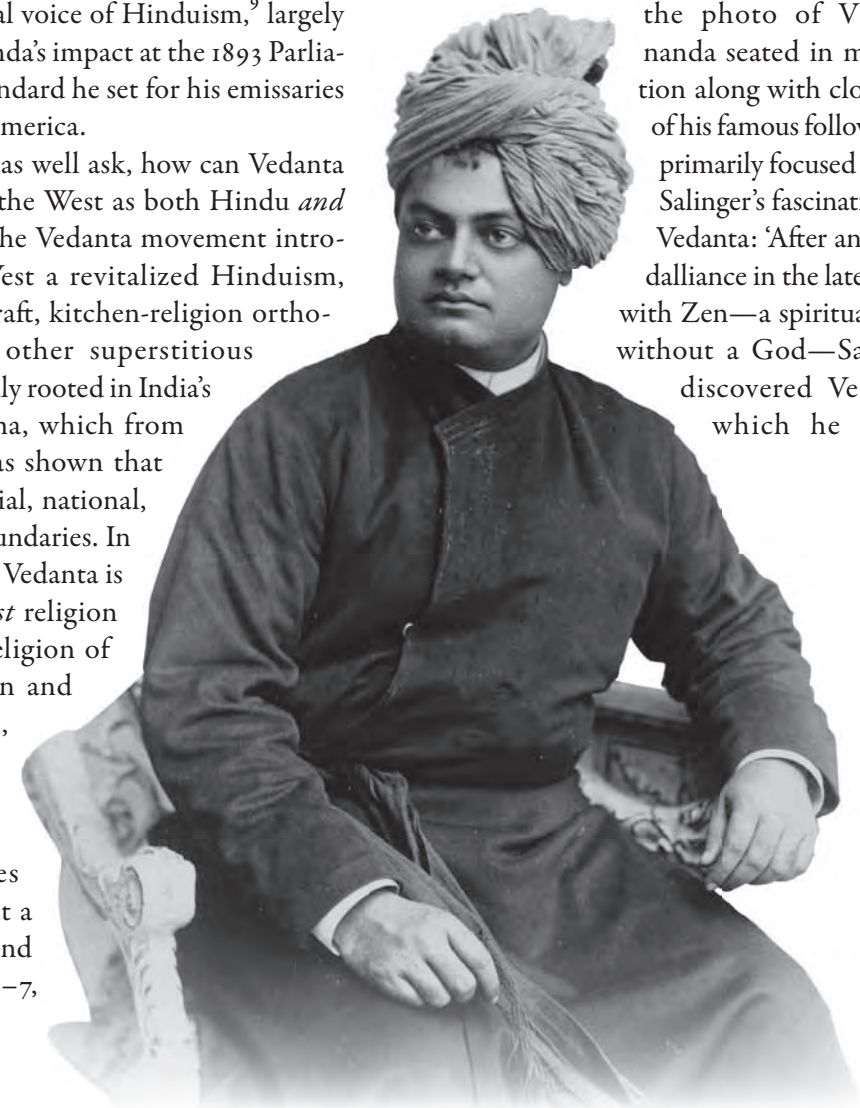
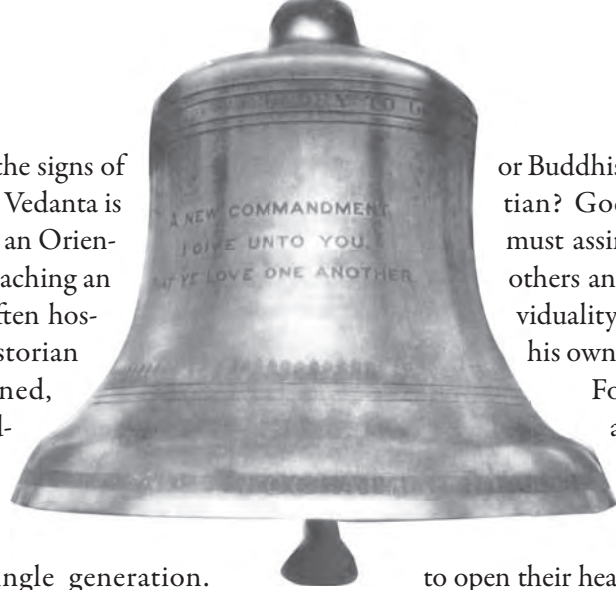
The fact that Swami Vivekananda neither proselytized, converted, nor charged for spirituality was refreshing to Americans, sixty per cent of whom would later leave organized religion during America's 'Great Church Exodus' of the 1960s, due to their disenchantment with the Judeo-Christian church authority, dogma, and its business of religion. Since the 1960s American scholars and clergy alike regard Vedanta as the official voice of Hinduism,⁹ largely due to Vivekananda's impact at the 1893 Parliament and the standard he set for his emissaries and mission in America.

Yet we might as well ask, how can Vedanta present itself to the West as both Hindu *and* non-sectarian? The Vedanta movement introduced to the West a revitalized Hinduism, bereft of priestcraft, kitchen-religion orthodoxies, or any other superstitious dogmas, but solidly rooted in India's Sanatana Dharma, which from ancient times has shown that it transcends racial, national, and sectarian boundaries. In this special sense Vedanta is both the *youngest* religion and the *oldest* religion of the world. It can and does, therefore, represent both non-sectarianism and Hinduism, features that have given it a broader appeal and special status (85–7, 144).

'You Are not Your Mind'

Other factors of the Vedanta movement's success in America were its substantial literary movement and the publicity Vivekananda and the early pioneer swamis received from prominent Americans. In a 29 March 2012 article in the *Wall Street Journal* by A L Bardach, the bold headlines read: 'What Did J D Salinger, Leo Tolstoy, Nikola Tesla and Sarah Bernhardt Have in Common?' And the subtitle reads: 'The surprising—and continuing—influence of Swami Vivekananda, the Pied Piper of the Global Yoga Movement.'

The article—illustrated with the photo of Vivekananda seated in meditation along with close-ups of his famous followers—primarily focused on J D Salinger's fascination for Vedanta: 'After an initial dalliance in the late 1940s with Zen—a spiritual path without a God—Salinger discovered Vedanta, which he found



infinitely more consoling. “Unlike Zen,” Salinger’s biographer, Kenneth Slawenski, points out, “Vedanta offered a path to a personal relationship with God. ... [and] a promise that he could obtain a cure for his depression. ... and find God, and through God, peace.”¹⁰

Bardach then fleshed out her article by adding how Vivekananda’s influence blossomed well into the mid-twentieth century, ‘infusing the work of Mahatma Gandhi, Carl Jung, George Santayana, Jane Addams, Joseph Campbell and Henry Miller, among assorted luminaries’ (ibid.).

In the 1980s Vivekananda seemed to be eclipsed by what Bardach called ‘American baby boomers—more disposed to “doing” than “being,” and who ‘opted for “hot yoga” classes over meditation,’ thus morphing his spiritual teaching ‘into a fitness cult with expensive accessories.’ However, undaunted by this passing phase, Bardach highlighted instead Vivekananda’s inherently long-lasting appeal. ‘If there were a single takeaway line that boils down his teachings to one spiritual bullet point,’ Bardach asserted, ‘it would be “You are not your body.”’ This might be bad news for the yoga-mat crowd. The good news for beleaguered souls like Salinger was Vivekananda’s corollary: ‘You are not your mind.’ What then was and is the key to Vivekananda’s success in the West? Bardach posited: ‘Vivekananda’s genius was to simplify Vedantic thought to a few accessible teachings that Westerners found irresistible’ (ibid.).

God was not the capricious tyrant in the heavens avowed by Bible-thumpers, but rather a power that resided in the human heart. ‘Each soul is potentially divine,’ Vivekananda promised. ‘The goal is to manifest that divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.’ And to close the deal for the fence-sitters, he punched up Vedanta’s embrace of other faiths and their prophets. Christ and Buddha were incarnations

of the divine, he said, no less than Krishna and his own teacher, Ramakrishna (ibid.).

Carl Jackson also noted that the success of the Vedanta movement in America has depended heavily on its attempt to adapt to Western conditions such as its Protestant-style Sunday morning sermons and weekly classes.¹¹ This standard was set by Vivekananda himself, who adopted the Western-style lecture format throughout America and eventually started weekly classes for more dedicated seekers in New York.

Jackson noted that from the 1930s to the 1950s the typical Vedanta members were middle class and upper-middle class families—mostly adults with a disproportionate number of females in a ratio of two to one (97–8). The average spiritual seeker was from a Protestant background and some were connected with Theosophy, New Thought, Spiritualism, or Christian Science (98). Of the 1950s testimonials contained in *What Vedanta Means to Me*, Vedanta’s greatest appeal was its universality versus Western Christianity’s dogmatism, an appeal that remains popular today (100). Danielle Gaither, a college student at the University of North Texas in Denton, recently shared her attraction:

One thing I really like about Vedanta is that there isn’t One True Way to practice it. People are encouraged to find what combination of the different Yogas works for them. Also, the Vedanta Society is the only spiritual community where I’ve felt that my entire self is welcome. In every other path I’ve tried, I’ve felt that I had to leave some parts of myself at the door, like my political beliefs or my critical thinking skills.¹²

‘I Believe that too’

Another key to the Vedanta movement’s success is its practical, experiential methodology and direct mystical approach. Christopher Isherwood vouched: ‘Vedanta made me understand



Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893

for the first time that a practical, working religion is experimental and empirical. You are always on your own, finding things out for yourself in your individual way.’¹³ For others, it is Vedanta’s psychological insight and positive understanding of human nature that provides a therapeutic perspective for spiritual growth. For still others, former Christians and Jews have found that through their contact with Vedanta, they then developed a renewed respect for fundamental teachings of Christianity and Judaism. Playwright John van Druten mentioned that after his introduction to Vedanta, he could ‘turn back’ to Christianity, discovering ‘much more’ than he had ‘ever suspected of existing’ (101).

Unlike many Indian immigrants in America, American-born Vedantists are more drawn to Vedanta’s interreligious and academic mission in the West. On the one hand, native-born Hindus have little interest in interreligious exchange with Christians or Muslims, who have too often historically scorned their religion and desecrated their temples. But on the other hand, Westerners embrace comparative religions and interfaith venues because this is often *how* they are introduced to Vedanta. Once they become committed

Vedantists, Westerners feel that such academic and interfaith outreach connects their Vedanta tradition with American society in a broad and healthy way; in fact, it prevents Vedanta from becoming just another cosy, insulated Hindu cult with no recognized standing or voice in their own culture and society. Furthermore, most Westerners take pride in Vedanta’s seminal role in interreligious dialogue and sincerely seek to understand how their religion holds up against other religious traditions of the world. In the process they often find that a meaningful spiritual exchange of fundamental perspectives amongst religious traditions deepens and broadens their own Vedanta perspective. In order to explain Hinduism to other curious Americans, they, in turn, are forced to deepen their own understanding of Vedanta.¹⁴

Because of the American Vedanta Societies’ continued commitment to interreligious dialogue, Jewish and Christian spiritual leaders have also found their own rapport with Vivekananda’s life and teachings. Rabbi Henschel Dov Hoffman, psychiatrist and Hasidic Jewish representative of the renowned Snowmass Conference, who was invited to participate in a Vedanta Society retreat at Olema, in northern California, affirmed

that he often quotes Vivekananda's teachings to members of his own synagogue.¹⁵ Rabbi Rami Shapiro, renowned lecturer and author, also professes a deep connection with Vivekananda and Vedanta. 'The realization and the expression of Brahman as Atman speak to me on so many levels,' Shapiro explained, 'but most of all it addresses the moral challenges of life. I come from a tradition of law and commandments, but this rests on the authority of God and revelation, neither of which speak to me. I do not believe in a god somewhere, but in the Divine Reality that is everywhere and everything.'

'But that is not why I pursued initiation,' the rabbi continued. 'It is not enough that I know the principles of Vedanta. When I looked to the heroes of Vedanta—Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, Vivekananda—I found the kinds of people I myself wish to become.'¹⁶

In June 2009 the Northaven United Methodist Church, in Dallas, Texas—in the conservative heart of

America's 'Bible Belt'—invited Vedanta to participate in its monthly interfaith 'Contemplative Life Series'. Bob Stewart, chairman of the series, frankly admitted: 'Some Methodists are dissatisfied with the lack of any kind of spiritual practice in the Methodist Church.' During these monthly gatherings of two hundred seekers—Methodist and non-Methodist, church and unchurched—members of the audience have subsequently requested interviews at the local Vedanta centre, including Christian ministers, theologians, and missionaries, and a sixteen-year-old boy who heard about Vedanta for the first time with his mother. The boy was so moved by the message of Vivekananda that he could not sleep that night. The next morning he wrote:

Dear Member of the Vedanta Society—

My name is Conner Gillette and I have recently attended *The Contemplative Life* presentation. After going to a Christian church my whole life, I have started to question why only Jesus is the way to

heaven, when so many other faiths seem to have righteous qualities and aims toward the betterment of humanity. It didn't seem that only one faith had it correct and the rest are going to hell, no matter how just of a faith or person they were. I need to follow the urgings [*sic*] of my heart, and it urges me to find truth and love, in whatever form it presents itself and to live by it. After hearing the talk on Vedanta, I feel that this is a form of truth that computes with my emotion, my intellect, and my heart. I would like to make an appointment to learn more of this philosophy and its practices.

Thank you from my heart, Conner Gillette.¹⁷

Four months later, Conner was initiated.

Not all interreligious or academic events are necessarily inspired, congenial, or even non-confrontational encounters. However, some of the most stimulating have been the tri-annual visits to the Santa Barbara Vedanta temple of the sociology classes from Westmont College, one of the foremost Christian missionary colleges in America. The students are intelligent, well-versed in Christian scriptures, sometimes dogmatic and, therefore, markedly challenging. Once, when Bible's teaching 'Ye are gods; and all of ye are children of the most High'¹⁸ was used to clarify Vedanta's belief in the divinity of the soul, a bitter debate ensued from the visiting students over the 'correct' intent of Christ's

words 'Ye are gods'.¹⁹ Finally, one student arose and challenged his fellow students: 'If there is no interfaith council here in this city, these comparative religions classes provide us with the same benefit.' He then bravely stated: 'Many of us have been trained to think that there is only one belief. But this class has shown us that there are other paths.'²⁰ The class was silenced; all of us deeply moved by this hard-won and broadening outcome. Thereafter, each year students from Westmont College visit the Vedanta temple in Santa Barbara to interview the nuns for their term papers on Vedanta philosophy.

As Vedantists we should *never* mind if our message of Vedanta arouses a strong reaction in our audience. Questions may come from people's ignorance or prejudice, but aside from his sometimes cutting rebukes, Vivekananda could also react with sympathy or humour. At Thousand Island Park Miss Dutcher, a staunch Methodist and the hostess at the cottage where Vivekananda delivered his *Inspired Talks*, would often become so distressed at the swami's revolutionary ideals that she would disappear for two or three days at a time. But Vivekananda would explain to others in his class: 'Don't you see? ... This is no ordinary illness. It is the reaction of the body against the chaos that is going on in her mind. She cannot bear it.'²¹

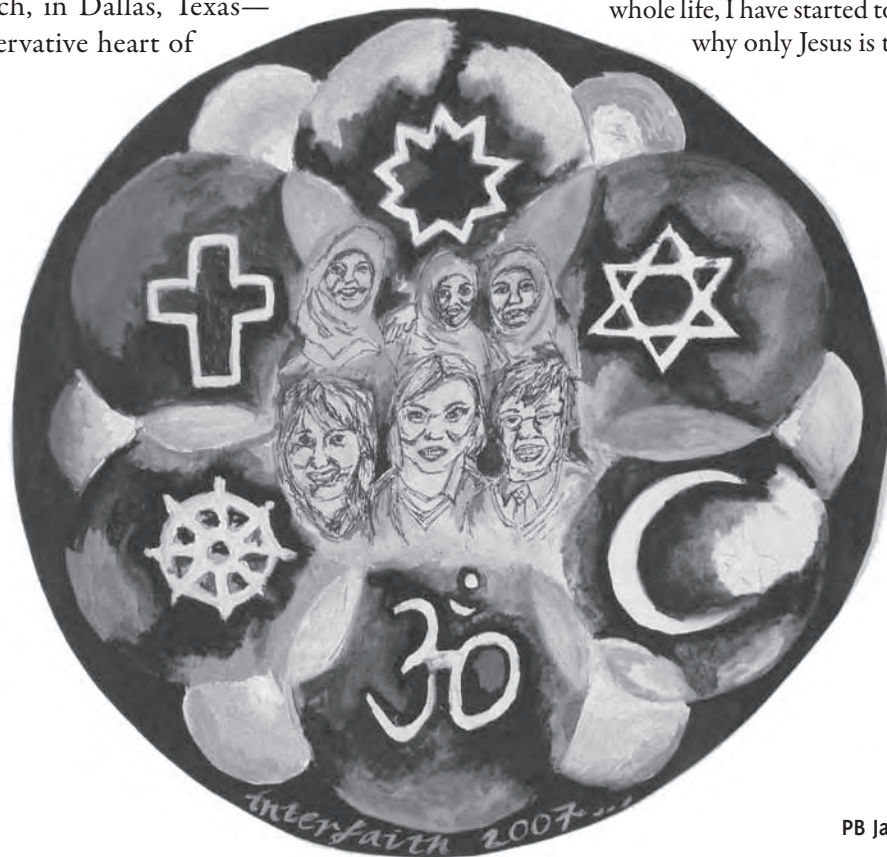


IMAGE: 'INTERFAITH' / [HTTP://ALANGUAGEOFTHESUAL.COM/PHDRESEARCH/PHDDEFENSE/INDEX.HTM](http://ALANGUAGEOFTHESUAL.COM/PHDRESEARCH/PHDDEFENSE/INDEX.HTM)

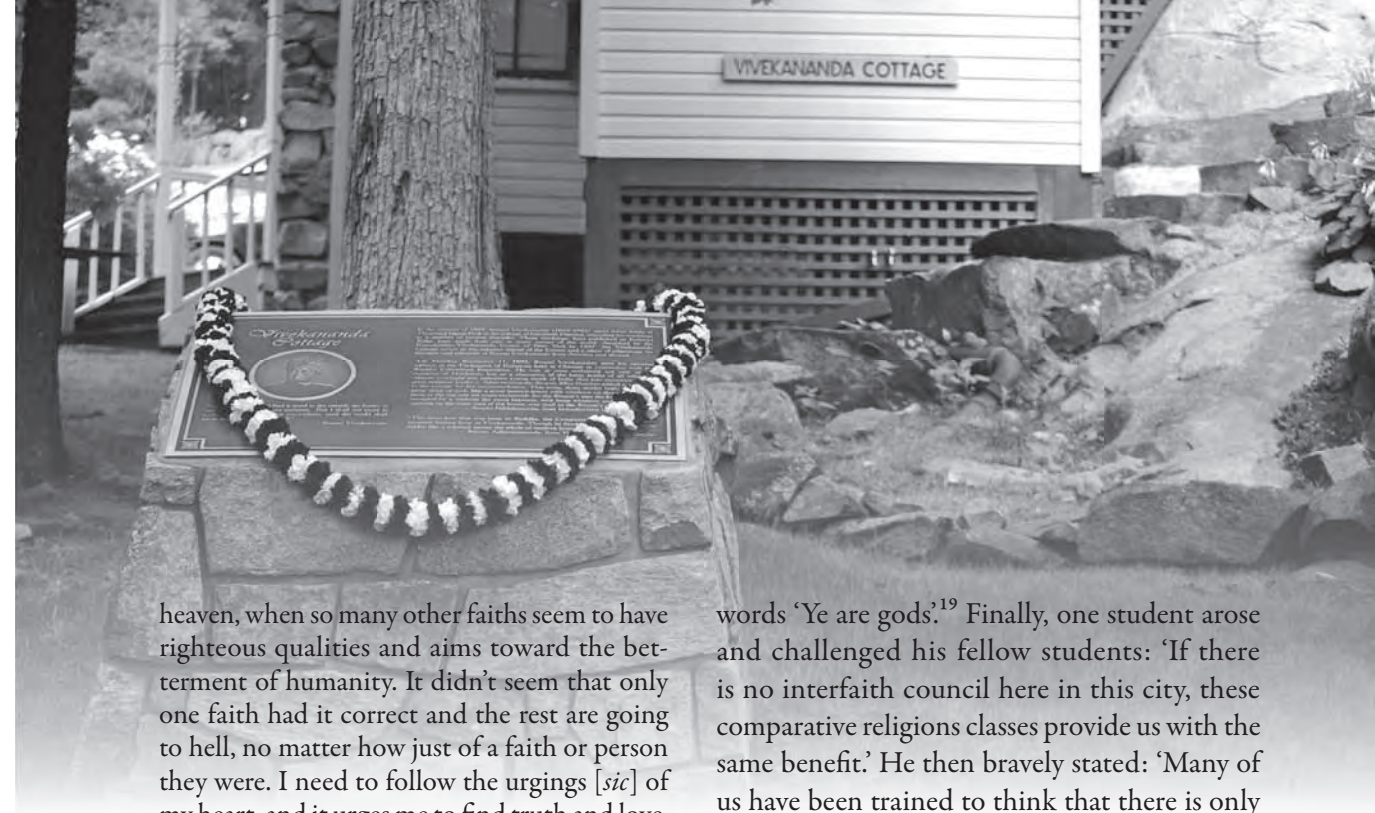



IMAGE: COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AT VIVEKANANDA COTTAGE, THOUSAND ISLANDS PARK, USA

Often, when Vedanta representatives speak before high school or university classes—whether they are psychology, sociology, anthropology, ecology, Asian studies, spirituality, or comparative religions classes—instructors sometimes share their students' candid reactions. Recently, after an introductory Vedanta presentation at a World Religions class of divinity school graduates at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, the professor shared his students' responses, the following three of which were representative of the class's reactions:

Ryan: 'I like Hinduism's inclusivity. I like the idea that God is in everyone. And the next time I feel frustrated with someone, I'm going to try to remember this.'

Christina: 'The concept of having many gods who are manifestations of the supreme God, Brahman, is *compelling*. Hinduism understands inclusive spirituality with both feminine and masculine embodiments of God.'

Scott: 'For me personally I felt the explanation of Vivekananda's four yogas was truly insightful and *are* methods we should apply to the Christian religion.'²²

Today, no matter *where* in America, when strangers ask 'What are your beliefs?' and I reply 'All religions lead to the same Truth,' invariably their heads nod in assent, 'Yes, I believe that too!' Somehow this never ceases to amaze me. What was once considered unthinkable before Vivekananda's advent is now accepted as American mainstream thought. Indeed, Vivekananda has left, and continues to leave, an indelible mark on America's spiritual development. 

Notes and References

1. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/remarks-president-joint-session-indian-parliament-new-delhi-india>> accessed 31 August 2012.

2. 'Abroad in America', National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, 1976.
3. Carl T Jackson, *The Swami in America: A History of the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1969), 617–18.
4. *The New York Times*, 2 October 2011; available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/opinion/sunday/how-yoga-won-the-west.html>> accessed 31 August 2012.
5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.24.
6. Father Thomas Keating's endorsement in *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom*, ed. and comp. Swami Chetanananda (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986).
7. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), 3.326.
8. *Complete Works*, 5.187.
9. Carl T Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 144.
10. *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 March 2012; available at <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303404704577305581227233656.html>> accessed 31 August 2012.
11. See *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*, 138.
12. Testimonial submitted for publication in 2010.
13. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*, 100.
14. Research gathered from conversations and interviews.
15. Conversation at Snowmass Conference's Mentoring Retreat, Colorado, June 2010.
16. Testimonial submitted for publication in 2010.
17. Email correspondence, 6 June 2009.
18. Psalms 82:6.
19. John 10:34.
20. Private Journal, 1980s.
21. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 3.121.
22. Dr Ruben Habito's class on 'Spirituality and Religion' at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 2010.

Swami Vivekananda's Experiences in China

William Page

ANYONE WHO HAS READ Swami Vivekananda's 'Memoirs of European Travel'¹ will agree that he had a quick eye and keen power of observation. And this is evident throughout his memoirs and letters. His observations were backed by a deep interest in world history and human nature, which made his narratives highly interesting. Swamiji also had a superb insight that penetrated into the heart of what he observed.

Swamiji visited China only once and spent three days there. He only saw Hong Kong and Guangzhou, then called Canton, so the glimpses he gives are fragmentary. While he was travelling to Chicago to attend the World Parliament of Religions, his ship, the *P & O Peninsular*, docked in Hong Kong for three days in June 1893. He took advantage of this time to travel the 80 miles up the Pearl River to Canton, where he managed to visit one of the Chinese Buddhist temples.²

Hong Kong

Swamiji wrote a long letter to Alasinga Perumal and other friends in Madras from Yokohama on 10 July 1893 giving the details of his stay:

Hong Kong is real China. As soon as the steamer casts anchor, you are besieged with hundreds of Chinese boats to carry you to the land. These boats with two helms are rather peculiar. The boatman lives in the boat with his family. Almost always, the wife is at the helms, managing one with her hands and the other with one of her feet. And in ninety per cent of cases, you find a baby tied to her back, with the hands and feet of the little Chin [*sic*] left free. It is a quaint sight to see the little John Chinaman dangling very quietly from his mother's back, whilst she is now setting with might and main, now pushing heavy loads, or jumping with wonderful agility from boat to boat. And there is such a rush of boats and steam-launches coming in and going out.³



William Page is a retired professor of English from the Thammasat University, Bangkok.

ART: 'QUEEN'S ROAD, HONGKONG' CHROMOLITHOGRAPH AFTER A DRAWING BY EDUARD HILDEBRANDT, C. 1865

The boats Swamiji refers to were probably sampans, which are still used. They are usually 3.5 to 4.5 metres long and often have a shelter that can be used as permanent living quarters, if you do not mind a little crowding. The 'two helms' Swamiji refers to may have been oars.

Swamiji's narrative continues:

Baby John is every moment put into the risk of having his little head pulverised, pigtail and all; but he does not care a fig. This busy life seems to have no charm for him, and he is quite content to learn the anatomy of a bit of rice-cake given to him from time to time by the madly busy mother. The Chinese child is quite a philosopher and calmly goes to work at an age when your Indian boy can hardly crawl on all fours. He has learnt the philosophy of necessity too well. Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilisation. To an ordinary Hindu or Chinese, everyday necessity is too hideous to allow him to think of anything else (5,7).

Why was the Chinese baby, a boy, wearing a pigtail? In those days China was ruled by the Manchus, people from Manchuria who wore their hair in a long queue, or pigtail. They conquered China in the seventeenth century CE, founded the Qing dynasty, and forced the ethnic Han Chinese to wear their hair in the Manchu style as a sign of subjugation, under penalty of death. Not until the Qing dynasty fell in 1911 were the Chinese allowed to cut off their queues.

Swamiji resumes: 'Hong Kong is a very beautiful town. It is built on the slopes of hills and on the tops too, which are much cooler than the city. There is an almost perpendicular tramway going to the top of the hill, dragged by wire-rope and steam-power (ibid.).

The Peak Tram, as it is now called, had been opened in 1888, only five years before Swamiji's visit, so it was relatively new at the time. It was the first funicular railway in Asia. It is still there, but has been much modernized—electricity replaced coal-driven steam power in 1926. It is a popular



Peak Tram,
Hong Kong

PB January 2013



Canton, China, c.1880-90

tourist attraction, now serving 17,000 people per day, and relatively cheap. Before it was built the only access to the summit of the hill was by sedan chair or palanquin, carried by two coolies.

The hill Swamiji mentions is Victoria Peak, popularly called the Peak, and at 552 metres it is the highest point on Hong Kong Island. In Swamiji's day it was the residence mainly of British officials and expatriates trying to escape the summer heat. Like its tram, the Peak is a famous tourist attraction, now drawing seven million visitors per year. The view is spectacular, especially at night, encompassing Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and Victoria Harbour.

Canton

Swamiji's narrative continues: 'We remained three days at Hong Kong and went to see Canton, which is eighty miles up a river [the Pearl River]. The river is broad enough to allow the biggest steamers to pass through. A number of Chinese steamers ply between Hong Kong and Canton. We took passage on one of these in the evening and reached Canton early in the morning. What a scene of bustle and life! What an immense number of boats almost covering the waters!' (Ibid.).

Swamiji comments on the Chinese customs of the day: 'The Chinese ladies can never be seen.

PB January 2013



'Confucius, Lao-tzu and Buddhist Arhat', by Ding Yunpeng
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper / Palace Museum, Beijing

They have got as strict a zenana as the Hindus of Northern India; only the women of the labouring classes can be seen. Even amongst these, one sees now and then a woman with feet smaller

than those of your youngest child, and of course they cannot be said to walk, but hobble' (5.8).

This refers to the old Chinese custom of foot binding, which started among the aristocracy in the tenth century CE and later spread to the other classes. In those days the Chinese regarded big feet as ugly and considered dancing girls with small feet to be the epitome of beauty. The ideal size for a woman's foot, believe it or not, was a mere seven centimetres. So parents would break their daughters' feet from an early age by bending the toes backward to touch the heels and bind them in that position with cloth wrappings. Of course, both the process and its aftermath were horribly painful, and the victims were crippled for life. But tiny feet gave women great prestige. It made them desirable as wives and signified that they were so rich they did not have to work. The way they hobbled was also considered alluring. This barbarous custom eventually died out in the early twentieth century, doubtless to the great relief of Chinese women.

Swamiji resumes: 'I went to see several Chinese temples. The biggest in Canton is dedicated to the memory of the first Buddhistic Emperor and the five hundred first disciples of Buddhism. The central figure is of course Buddha, and next beneath Him is seated the Emperor, and ranging on both sides are the statues of the disciples, all beautifully carved out of wood' (ibid).

Despite an extensive search, I have been unable to identify this temple. Swamiji's description is puzzling. The two best-known temples in Guangzhou today are the Temple of the Six Banyans (Liurong Si) and the Temple of Bright Filial Piety (Guangxiao Si). Neither seems to match Swamiji's description. They both have prominent pagodas, but Swamiji does not mention a pagoda. The 'first Buddhistic Emperor' to rule over a unified China seems to have been Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty, who ruled from

581–604 CE. I know of no temple in contemporary Guangzhou that might have been dedicated to him.

The description of the images is also puzzling, because in most Chinese temples the image of Sakyamuni Buddha is flanked by two other Buddhas, Amitabha and Bhaisajya, with no image of any emperor anywhere. Perhaps the temple Swamiji visited was different. As for the statues of the five hundred disciples, one current temple, Hualin Si, does have statues of five hundred arhats, although the rest of Swamiji's description does not match it. But many of the temples that existed during Swamiji's time may have been modified since—or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). It is possible that the temple he visited no longer exists.

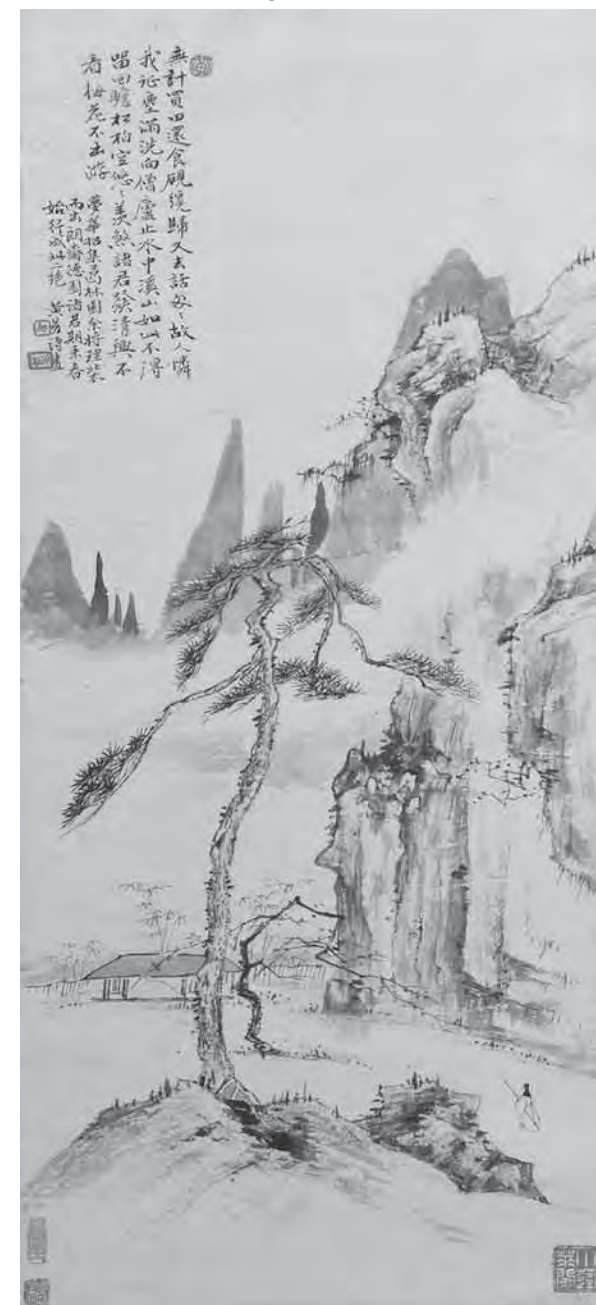
Adventure in a Chinese Monastery

Swamiji had an adventure in Canton.

As a monk his earnest desire was to visit a Chinese monastery. Unfortunately, these monasteries were forbidden ground to foreigners. What could be done? When he asked the interpreter, he was told that a visit was impossible. But this served only to intensify his desire: he must see a Chinese monastery! He said to the interpreter, 'Suppose a foreigner should go there, what then?' and received the reply, 'Why, sir, they would be sure to maltreat him!' The Swami thought that if the monks knew him to be a Hindu sannyasi, they would not molest him. So he persisted, and finally induced the interpreter and his fellow passengers to tread 'forbidden ground,' saying laughingly, 'Come, let us see if they will kill us!' But they had not gone far when the interpreter cried out, 'Away! Away, gentlemen! They are coming, and they are infuriated!' Two or three men with clubs in their hands were approaching rapidly. Frightened at their menacing appearance, all but the Swami and the interpreter took to their heels. When even the latter was on the point of fleeing, the

Swami seized him by the arm and said with a smile, 'My good man, you must not run away before you tell me the Chinese word for Indian Yogi.' Having been told this, the Swami

'Embarking on the Journey', hanging scroll, ink on paper, c.18th cent.
Edward and Goldie Sternberg Chinese Art Purchase Fund



loudly called out that he was an Indian Yogi. And lo, the word for 'Yogi' acted like magic! The angry expressions of the men changed to that of deep reverence and they fell at his feet. They rose, stretched out their joined palms in most respectful salutation, and then said something in a loud voice, one word of which the Swami understood to be 'Kabatch'. He thought that it was undoubtedly the Indian word meaning amulet; but to be sure of what they meant, he shouted a question to the interpreter, who stood at a safe distance, confounded at these strange developments. ... For an explanation he said, 'Sir, they want amulets to ward off evil spirits and unholy influences. They desire your protection.' The Swami was taken aback for a moment. He did not believe in charms. Then he took a sheet of paper from his pocket, divided it into several pieces, and wrote on them the word 'Om' in Sanskrit. ... He gave them the pieces of paper, and the men, touching them to their heads, led him into the monastery.

In the more isolated portions of the building he was shown many Sanskrit manuscripts, written, strange to say, in old Bengali characters. And then it occurred to him that when he had visited the temple dedicated to the first Buddhist Emperor he had been struck with the unmistakable resemblance between the faces of the Blessed One's five hundred followers and those of Bengalis. These evidences, as also his past study of Chinese Buddhism, convinced him that Bengal and China had at one time been in close communication, that there must have been a great influx into China of Bengali Bhikkhus (Buddhist monks), who brought to that distant country the gospel of the Blessed One, and that Indian thought had influenced Chinese civilization to a significant extent.⁴

From Hong Kong Swamiji sailed to Japan, where 'to his amazement he found that here also the temples were inscribed with Sanskrit Mantras in old Bengali characters, although only a few of the priests knew Sanskrit' (1.398).

What were these old Bengali characters? Surprisingly, some inscriptions in them have survived down to the present time. I recall seeing, many years ago, a few old Buddha images, both on Taiwan and the Mainland, with fillets hanging down from the shoulders inscribed with characters that looked to be in some sort of Indian script. They were not Devanagari, nor Bengali, nor Tibetan—to my untutored eye they resembled Punjabi—but they were obviously of Indian origin. Nobody I asked knew how to read them.

While researching for this article, I decided to look into this. I emailed an old friend, Professor Victor H Mair, a distinguished Sinologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and asked him about it. He replied that the inscriptions, and probably the Sanskrit mantras Swamiji saw, were almost certainly written in a script called Siddham. He also sent me additional information and links.

It turns out that Siddham is the name of a North Indian script used for writing Sanskrit during the period c.600–1200 CE. It is descended from the Brahmi script through the Gupta script, which also gave rise to the Devanagari script as well as a number of other Asian scripts such as the Tibetan script. Many of the Buddhist texts, which were taken to China along the Silk Road, were written using a version of the Siddham script. This continued to evolve, and minor variations are seen across time, and in different regions. Importantly, it was used for transmitting the Buddhist tantra texts. At the time it was considered important to preserve the pronunciation of mantras, and Chinese was not suitable for writing the sounds of Sanskrit. This led to the retention of the Siddham script in East Asia.⁵

The script also spread to Japan, where the writing of mantras and the copying of sutras using the Siddham script is still practised in the

esoteric Buddhist schools of Shingon and Tendai. The Taisho edition of the Chinese Tripitaka preserves the Siddham characters for most mantras (ibid.).

The remark that 'Chinese was not suitable for writing the sounds of Sanskrit' is an understatement. Each Chinese character represents a syllable, and there is a limited number of characters. So the Chinese characters for 'Sakyamuni Buddha' are pronounced 'Shijiamouni Fo'; the mantra 'Namo Amitabha Buddha' becomes 'Nanwu Amito Fo'; and 'Prajnaparamita' comes out as 'Poruopoluomiduo'—in modern times Sri Ramakrishna's name comes out as 'Shili Luomokelixina'.

If Swami Vivekananda were to visit China today, he would find that, instead of trying to construct a phonetic approximation of his own name, which would probably come out as 'Wei-wei-jia-nan-duo', the Chinese have mercifully translated it as 'Bianxi', meaning 'Discrimination-Happiness'. But one thing he would not miss is what he had said in connection with China: 'I see before me the body of an elephant. There is a foal within. But it is a lion-cub that comes out of it. It will grow in future, and China shall become great and powerful.'⁶ ❧

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.295–404.
2. Alan Hunter, 'Swami Vivekananda in China', *Nirvana*, 57 (April-June 2008), 3.
3. *Complete Works*, 5.6–7.
4. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.395–7.
5. See Wikipedia, under 'Siddham alphabet', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddha%E1%B9%83_alphabet>, accessed 13 November 2012.
6. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.559.



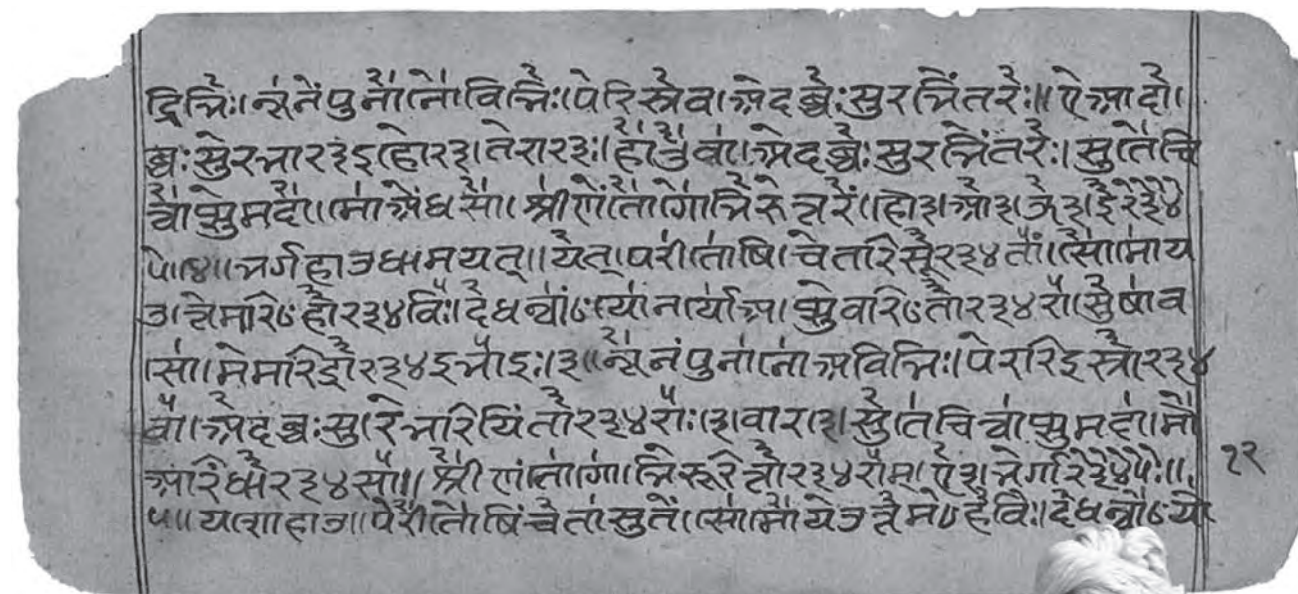
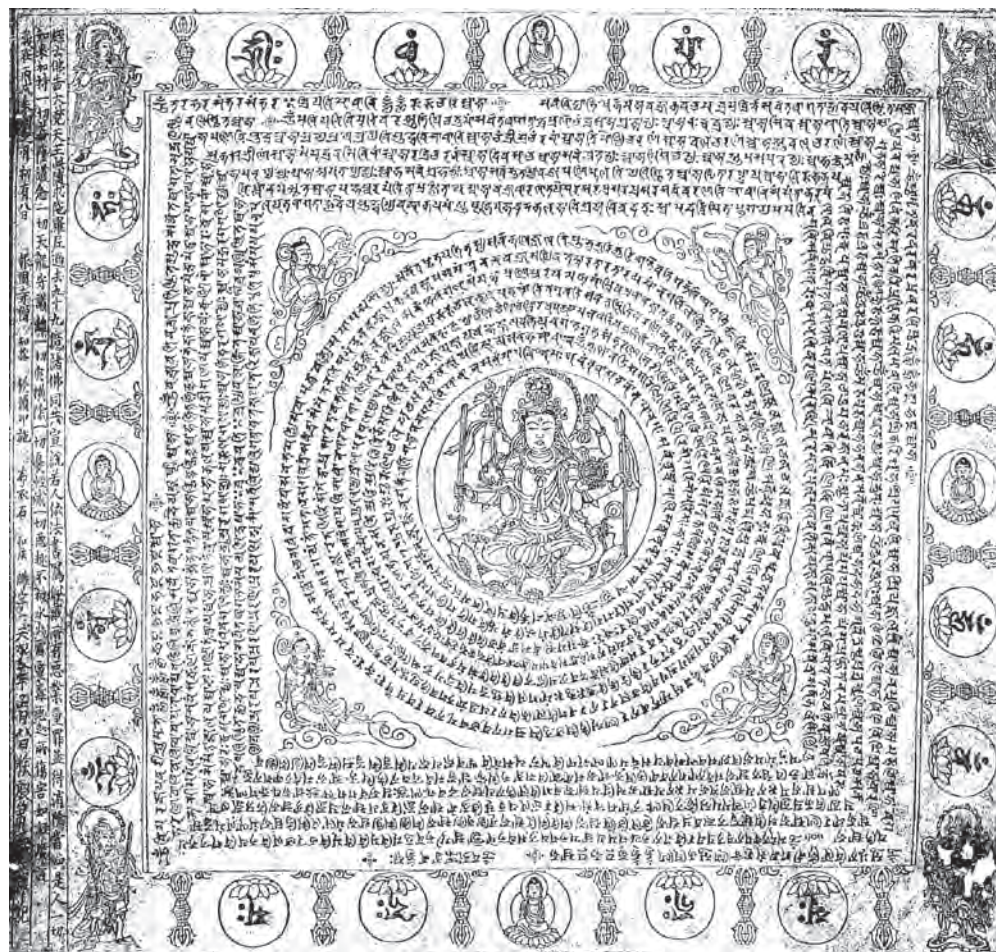
Consonants						Vowels					
	Stop					Approximant	Fricative	Independent form			
	Tenuis	Aspirated	Voiced	Breathy voiced	Nasal			Romanized	As diacritic with ऋ	Romanized	As diacritic with ऋ
Glottal							ह h				
Velar	क k	ख kh	ग g	घ gh	ङ ङ			अ a	ऋ	इ i	ऌ
Palatal	च c	छ ch	ज j	झ zh	ञ ञ	य y	र r	उ u	ऋ	ई e	ऌ
Retroflex	ट t	ठ th	ड d	ढ dh	ण ण	ल l	श s	ऊ o	ऋ	औ au	ऌ
Dental	त t	थ th	द d	ध dh	न n	व v	स s	ऌ	ऋ	ऌ	ऌ
Bilabial	प p	फ ph	ब b	भ bh	म m						
Labiodental						व v					

Conjuncts in alphabet											
क ks	ख kh	ग g	घ gh	ङ ङ	च c	छ ch	ज j	झ zh	ञ ञ	ट t	ठ th
ड d	ढ dh	ण ण	त t	थ th	द d	ध dh	न n	म m	य y	र r	ल l
व v	श s	ष s	ह h	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ	ळ ळ

Alternative forms											
अ a	इ i	उ u	ऋ	ऌ	ऍ	ऎ	ए	ऐ	ऑ	ऒ	ओ
औ	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ	ट

Siddham Alphabet

Chinese use of Siddham script for the Pratisara Mantra, from the Later Tang Dynasty, 927 CE



Swami Vivekananda on Language

Pankaj Dwivedi

OVER THE CENTURIES scholars have convincingly argued that we understand the world in terms of language. Thinking and language are two sides of the same coin. One is not possible without the other. Schools of thought demanding the highest level of discipline, such as mathematics and logic, are also considered specialized linguistic structures. Philosophy, the mother of all sciences, heavily draws on language across all levels and on all forms. Indian scholarship recognized it long ago; therefore, the study of language was central to the other prominent sciences such as astronomy, medicine, and chemistry. Indian scholars focused mainly on the grammar of Vedic Sanskrit. Nevertheless, correct use of the language on each level—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—was always explicitly emphasized.¹ Perhaps the underlying purpose was to strengthen the main carrier of knowledge, language, so that other forms of learning could effortlessly take place.

History of Sanskrit and Swamiji's Studies

Sanskrit was usually grouped with logic, mathematics, and philosophy. Scholars believe that the serious and organized study of language in India dates back to about 500–400 BCE, when Panini's work on the grammar of Vedic Sanskrit might have



Pankaj Dwivedi is a PhD scholar in Linguistics at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Ropar, Punjab.

come into existence. Referring to the Aindra, or Indra, school of Sanskrit grammar, Panini himself mentions Gargya and Shakatayana's work on Vedic Sanskrit grammar at several places in his classical *Ashtadhyayi*. Since India had an oral tradition for imparting knowledge to future generations, dates could very well be pushed back by a couple of millennia. However, sage Panini is considered as the first and most notable scholar of the period. His monumental work is indisputably considered the foundation of linguistics by Eastern and Western scholars alike. Panini was followed by sages Katayana, Patanjali, Bhartrihari, and others. Panini's work is even today the sourcebook of Sanskrit learning.

One noteworthy point is that most of these scholars had not studied language for the sake of scholarship. It was considered that without deep and accurate knowledge of linguistic structures, our perception of the world becomes

vague. Language is to knowledge what water is to clouds. They may look entirely different in appearance and place, but both are the same. The scholars that pioneered an organized study of the Sanskrit language were philosophers, logicians, mathematicians, litterateur, and also many gurus.

Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was one of the prominent Sanskrit scholars of the late nineteenth century. Even as a little boy he had memorized the aphorisms of the Sanskrit grammar *Mugdhabodha*.² All through his *parivrajya*, wandering, days he studied deeply various subjects. In Jaipur 'he met a noted Sanskrit grammarian. He decided to study grammar (Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*)' (1.277). Later at the Khetri palace he became acquainted with Pandit Narayandas, a foremost Sanskrit scholar, and 'decided to resume his study of the *Mahabhashya* (Patanjali's great commentary) on the Sutras of

Panini' (2.284). Again in Porbandar he finished his study of the *Mahabhashya*, helped Pandit Shankar Pandurang with the translation of the Vedas, and 'took up the study of French' (2.295). Swamiji's English was flawless and he was fluent in Hindi as well. In Goa he met 'Alvares who was greatly impressed by Swamiji's erudition, immediately made special arrangements for him to stay at the Rachol Seminary, the oldest convent-college of theology in Goa, four miles away from Margao, where rare religious literature in manuscripts and printed works in Latin [are] preserved' (2.319).

Apart from dispelling the prevailing evils of his time, such as superstition, untouchability, and illiteracy, Swamiji is duly credited for the revival of Hinduism. His famous speech beginning with 'Sisters and brothers of America,' at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893, brought Hinduism to the centre of world's attention and world religions. Introducing the knowledge of Indian philosophies from the Upanishads and yoga, to both occidentalists and orientalist, Swamiji also spoke much on the philosophy and importance of language. Drawing on the classical Indian philosophy of language he magnificently illustrated the assumptions, concepts, and goals of language.

On the Supremacy of Sanskrit

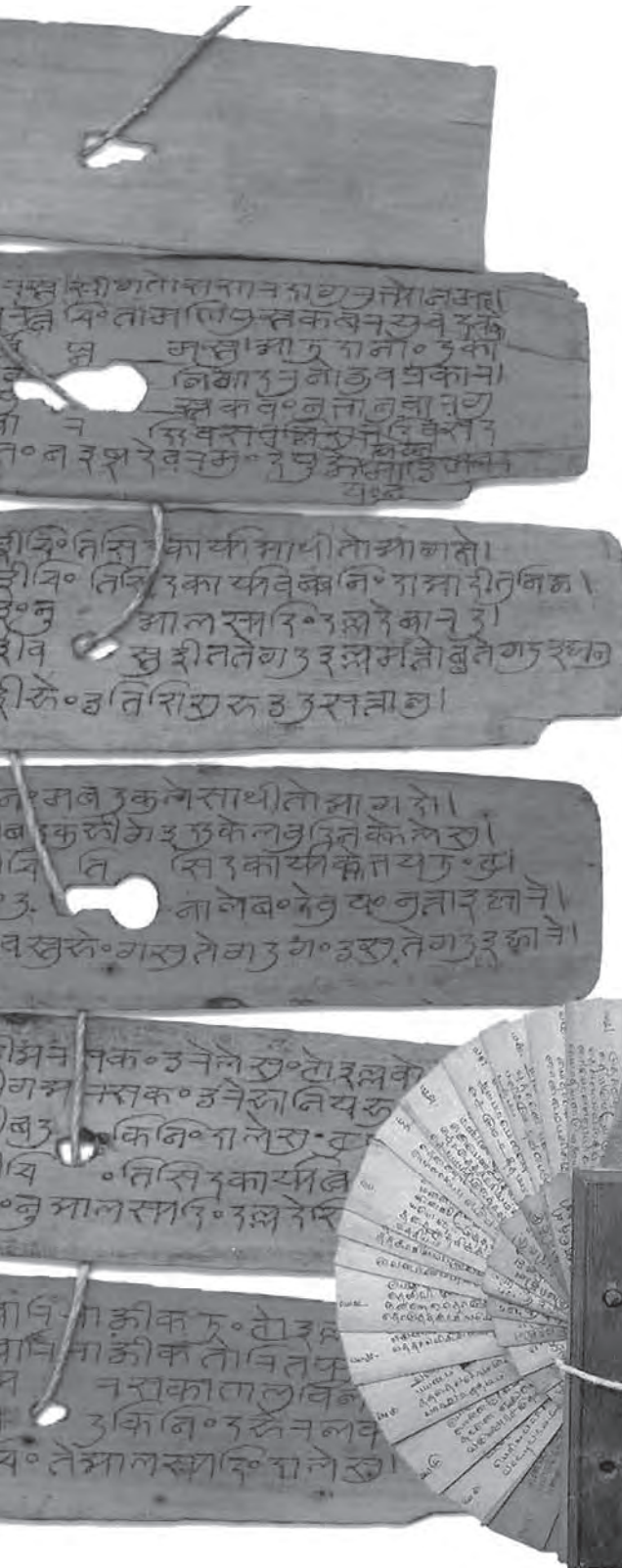
Modern linguistic findings accurately confirm the assumptions and views on language held by Swamiji, who always quoted the scriptures as his source of knowledge. Showing his inclination towards the grammar of the Sanskrit language, Swamiji said: 'Years ago I had an idea of studying the grammar of the Vedas, and I began with all earnestness to study Panini and the *Mahabhashya*, but to my surprise I found that the best part of the Vedic grammar consists only of exceptions to rules. A rule is made, and after that

Brahma worships Krishna, page from a dispersed Bhagavata Purana series, c.1800 / Brooklyn Museum



ART: COLLAGE BASED ON PALM LEAF SCRIPTURAL MANUSCRIPTS





comes a statement to the effect, “This rule will be an exception”. So you see what an amount of liberty there is for anybody to write anything.’³

In ‘Vedānta and its Application to Indian Life’ he said: ‘This Sanskrit language is so intricate, the Sanskrit language of the Vedas is so ancient, and the Sanskrit philology is so perfect, that any amount of discussion can be carried on for ages in regard to the meaning of one word’ (3.233). In one of his writings he stated: ‘The miracle of language which was called Sanskrit or “perfected”, lending itself to expressing and manipulating them [poetic insight] better than any other tongue. The aid of melodious numbers was invoked even to express the hard facts of mathematics’ (6.158).

These statements have not been made merely for the fact that Sanskrit is the language of the ancient Hindu scriptures, but they include a deeper linguistic insight. There are computer scientists who are of the opinion that Sanskrit can act as a perfect language for programming and scientific applications. Sanskrit is already widely used as a meta-language for knowledge-representation in machine-translation and other areas of natural language processing, because of its highly regular and unambiguous structure.

It was not that Swamiji spoke only about the Sanskrit language. It is just that he found the Sanskrit language better

than other natural languages. He held that all languages act as basic tools of communication within their own structural and conceptual limitations. All languages, from the standard to the least used vernacular, have their own importance. He clarified: ‘The difference between the language of the highest philosophers and the utterances of the babies is one of degree not of kind. What you call the most correct, systematic, and mathematical language of the present time, and the hazy, mystical, mythological languages of the ancients, differ only in degree. All of them have a grand idea behind, which is, as it were, struggling to express itself’ (2.74). ‘My ideal of language is my Master’s language, most colloquial and yet most expressive. It must express the thought which is intended to be conveyed’ (5.259).

How deeply familiar and interested he was with the physical and psychological mechanism of production, cognition, and acquisition of linguistic structures can easily be understood by his statements. For example, in *Raja Yoga* he described the process of speech-sound production. He wonderfully explained the articulatory mechanism involved in the production of Om: ‘In making a sound we use the larynx and the palate as a sounding board. ... Om (Aum) is such a sound, the basis of all sounds. The first letter, *A*, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate; *M* represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the *U* rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding board of the mouth.’ (1.218–9).

The following statement, from one of his letters, also reveals his adherence to the correct articulation of the sounds and description of words: “Mister” is “Monsieur” in the French language, and “Miss” is “Mademoiselle”—with a Z-sound’ (7.373).

On Language and Thought

India has a rich tradition of exploring the mind, perception, cognition, and consciousness. Most of these spheres have been studied in the various schools of Indian philosophy and logic. Considering language as a prime component of thought, and hence closely related to all these processes, centuries ago Indian scholars had made some appealing revelations. Until the latter half of the twentieth century CE, how language is connected to and represented in the mind was an open question in the West. In contrast, mentioning one of the oldest schools of Indian Philosophy, the Nyaya, Swamiji opined: ‘This knowledge ... is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man “knows”, should, in strict psychological language, be what he “discovers” or “unveils”; what a man “learns” is really what he “discovers”’ (1.28).

Every idea that you have in mind has a counterpart in a word; the word and thought are inseparable. ... No man can by analysis, separate thought from word. ... Although we see that there must always be a word with a thought, it is not necessary that the same thought requires the same word. The thought may be the same in twenty different countries, yet the language is different. ... We must have a word to express each thought, but these words need not necessarily have the same sound. ... These sounds vary, yet the relation between sounds and thoughts is a natural one. ... A symbol is the manifestor of the thing signified. ... There must be a natural connection between the symbol and the thing signified; then, when that symbol is pronounced, it recalls the thing signified (1.217–8).

The analysis of the language of a people can reveal its overall philosophy of life. Swamiji, at various places, explained how different

linguistic conceptualizations for the same action or event can reveal the cultural framework, spiritual grounding, societal acceptance, and attitudes of a people. One of his most quoted examples about 'death' is as follows: 'In Western language [English], a man gives up the ghost, but in our language a man gives up his body. The Western man is a body first, and then he has a soul; with us a man is a soul and spirit, and he has body. Therein lies a world of difference' (3.380).

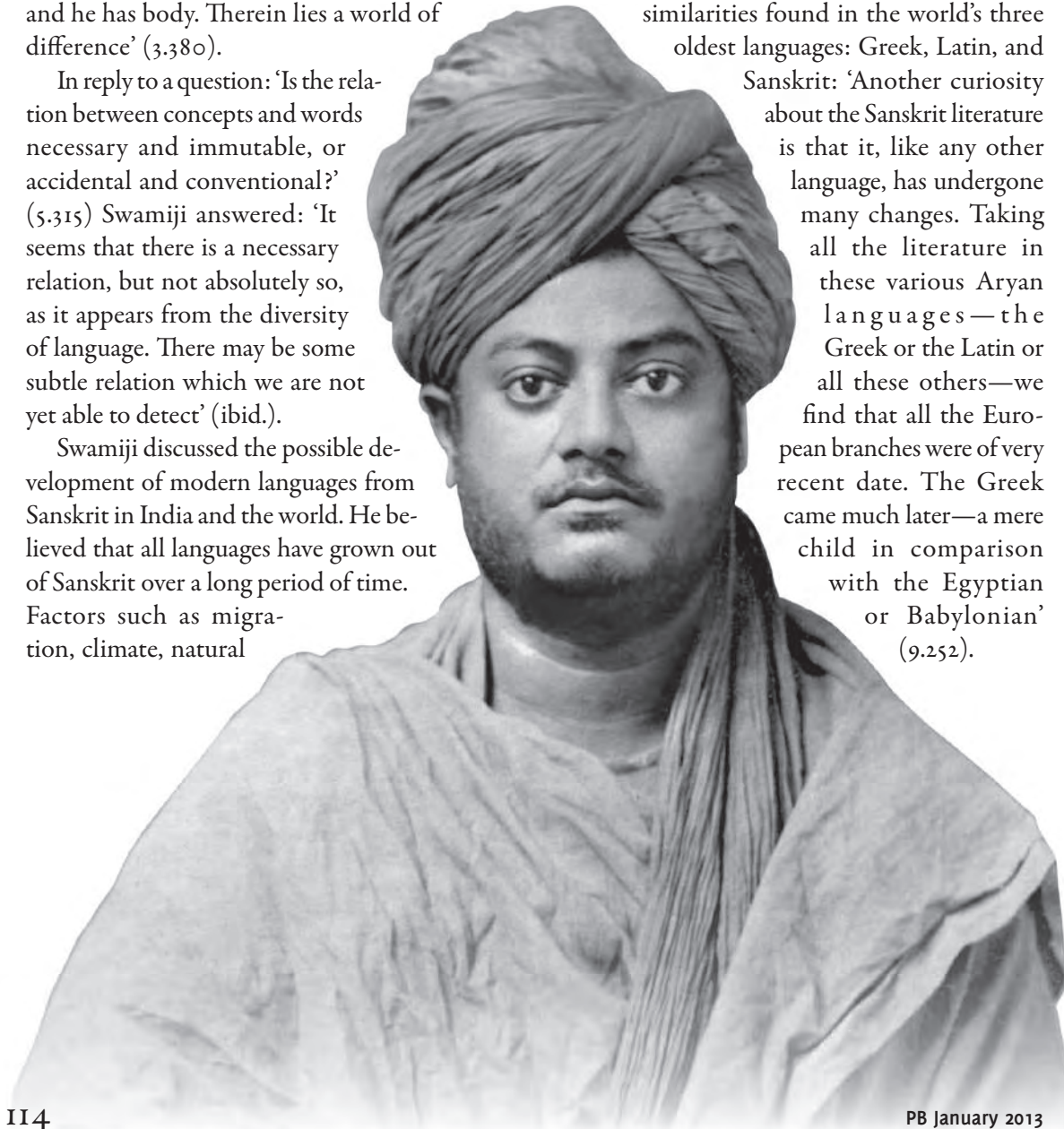
In reply to a question: 'Is the relation between concepts and words necessary and immutable, or accidental and conventional?' (5.315) Swamiji answered: 'It seems that there is a necessary relation, but not absolutely so, as it appears from the diversity of language. There may be some subtle relation which we are not yet able to detect' (ibid.).

Swamiji discussed the possible development of modern languages from Sanskrit in India and the world. He believed that all languages have grown out of Sanskrit over a long period of time. Factors such as migration, climate, natural

objects, differing lifestyles and needs, culture, and religion had brought a number of diachronic and synchronic modifications, which is natural, and as a result many linguistic varieties developed from the original Sanskrit. Further drastic modifications to these linguistic varieties made them dissimilar to such an extent that they came to be regarded as different languages. In support of his

argument, Swamiji presented the linguistic similarities found in the world's three oldest languages: Greek, Latin, and

Sanskrit: 'Another curiosity about the Sanskrit literature is that it, like any other language, has undergone many changes. Taking all the literature in these various Aryan languages—the Greek or the Latin or all these others—we find that all the European branches were of very recent date. The Greek came much later—a mere child in comparison with the Egyptian or Babylonian' (9.252).



Above: a text in Sanskrit praising Vishnu; below: a text in Pali from a Buddhist ceremonial scripture called Kammuwa; art by Johann Christoph Karl Faulmann, 1880

How under the influence of culture, society, and the process of development linguistic structures can change their meanings, so much so that they come to refer to just the opposite, can be seen with one of Swamiji's examples: 'The word devil is a Persian word. ... The Persians and Hindus [share the Aryan ancestry] upon religious grounds, and ... they spoke the same language, only the words one sect uses for good the other uses for bad. The word Deva is an old Sanskrit word for God, the same word in the Aryan languages. Here the word means the devil' (1.491).

On Language Use

Prescriptivists and descriptivists usually stand in contrast to each other. The former prefers using the standard form of language; the latter speaks for the linguistic equality, the use of

language. Swamiji wanted papers to be printed in English and in the vernacular. It is always seen that standard forms and the vernacular both account for their own benefits, losses, and compromises. On being asked a similar question about making a choice between the Bengali and the Sanskrit languages, Swamiji replied: 'The Bengali language must be modelled not after Sanskrit, but rather after the Pali, which has a strong resemblance to it. In coining or translating technical terms in Bengali, one must, however, use all Sanskrit words for them, and an attempt should be made to coin new words. For this purpose, if a collection is made from Sanskrit dictionary of all those technical terms, then it will help greatly the constitution of the Bengali language' (5.259).

By modelling Bengali after Pali Swamiji meant the language that people speak and

understand. Nevertheless, since Sanskrit is the root of almost all Indian languages, it is better to coin the technical and official vocabulary after Sanskrit for common use.

Swamiji favoured the use of the vernacular over Sanskrit as a medium for teaching. He stated: 'Therefore the ideas must be taught in the language of the people; at the same time, Sanskrit education must go along with it, because the very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige and a power and a strength to the race' (3.290). 'It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge' (3.291).

Opposing any artificial process of standardization, he said: 'A common language would be a great desideratum; but the same criticism applies to it, the destruction of the vitality of the various existing ones' (4.309).

Simplicity is a key to success in all spheres of life. It is equally true of a language. Swamiji believed that language should be simplified, only then can it be accepted and used by all. A language accepted by all is the language that lives the longest. The use of the simplest language is the best, and a teacher who uses simple words succeeds. All the great philosophical teachings were made available to people through popular mythological stories in the vernacular. 'Of course, scholarship is an excellent thing; but cannot scholarship be displayed through any other medium than a language that is stiff and unintelligible, that is unnatural and artificial? ... Do you not think of your scholastic researches in the language which you are accustomed to speak at home? Why then do you introduce such a queer and unwieldy thing when you proceed to put them in black and white?' (6.187).

Though all natural languages are capable of expressing sublime thoughts, modern scholars believe that the language one acquires as the

mother tongue is the best medium for transmitting information, ideas, and knowledge. The concepts presented in the mother tongue are grasped much easier than any language that one learns later through formal instructions. The mother tongue is to the mind as blood is to the body. Therefore, teaching children in the mother tongue can produce better results. There is enough evidence to show that learning and language are closely related to each other. 'Every man is capable of receiving knowledge if it is imparted in his own language' (5.263).

After a certain age, referred to as the critical period, the process of language learning considerably slows down, and so does the overall pace of learning, whereas in the initial years of life it happens effortlessly.

Conclusion

Apart from what was shown above, Swamiji also spoke a great deal about the different aspects of language such as the problems of translation, mixing of languages, language and politeness, language change, limitations of natural language, and language and culture. His remarks on language not only exhibit his scholarly vision on the subject, which was rooted in the classical Indian philosophy of language, but also his practical approach in dealing with the problems of language for the masses. His opinion about language can be summed up in the following statement: 'Race, religion, language, government—all these together make a nation' (3.286).

References

1. See *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.2.1.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.21.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.329.

BACKGROUND: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S BENGALI HANDWRITING

Vivekananda's Lasting Contribution to World Peace

Dr Anil Baran Ray

FUNDAMENTALISM IS BECOMING one of the most dangerous forces adversely affecting humanity. It went unheeded for centuries and was thought of as a passing phase or as something indulged in by the uneducated. Swami Vivekananda predicted that fundamentalism would hinder human progress and therefore preached against it. Fundamentalism is a strict maintenance of an ancient or fundamental doctrine of any religion or ideology. The fundamentalist lives by his or her faith and takes that little world as the whole, unquestioningly. Fundamentalism, taken to the extreme, rejects other faiths and is marked by intolerance, violence, and manipulation. Reflecting on its negative impact on

Dr Anil Baran Ray is a retired professor of Political Science from the University of Burdwan, WB.

civilization Swamiji says: ‘Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now.’¹

The political scientist Samuel P Huntington observed in 1996 that religious intolerance of any kind was the reason for the frequent clashes between religionists in many parts of the world. Such clashes are likely to be the dominant feature of the world in the future.² Some two years after this prophecy Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate in economics, argued at Oxford University that the human inability to place reason before identity was the cause for the clash among people of different religions. He later elaborated his thesis in *Identity and Violence*.³ The roots of violence in our times lie, he pointed out, in our misplaced sense of identity, and our deliverance lies in our freedom to think and to place reason before identity. In the context of Huntington’s foreboding words and Sen’s thesis, my humble opinion is that Swamiji went into the heart of things, anticipating all theories and research, more than a hundred years ago. He resolved several problems by showing the higher nature of humankind—the individual self is a part of the universal Self. This truth solves the question of identity and thereby resolves conflicts. He also showed that religion is based on experience and reason.

Swamiji’s Thesis

It is only by accepting and believing that there is a real and universal entity in us that we truly develop as human beings. This thesis was systematically developed by Swamiji in his ‘Paper on Hinduism’, read at the World’s Parliament of Religions on 19 September 1893. By way of

explaining the religious ideas of the Hindus, Swamiji declared to humanity its spiritual consciousness—a major object of his mission to the US. He taught how best we can bring about our highest development by orienting religion on reason and science.

Hinduism, he acknowledged, is divided into divergent sects, and the natural question that derives from this fact is if the diverging radii have any point of convergence. In other words: is there any great central truth to which all the Hindus agree? In answering this question Swamiji turned to the teachings of the Vedas, which are the accumulated spiritual laws discovered by the rishis through deep meditation. One of their discoveries, startling and scientific, was that creation has no beginning and no end, and that there never was a time when there was no creation. The whole process is cyclic—expanding and contracting, potential and kinetic. Like a mighty tree that grows from a seed and goes back into being a seed, so does creation evolve and involve constantly. Thus he says: ‘There never was a time when there was no creation.’⁴ If the Creator is eternal, so is creation. Some scientific creation theories of today are in agreement with Swamiji’s thoughts on creation.

Just as the Vedas teach that creation and the Creator are eternal, they also logically go further and teach that the individual soul is the manifestation of the universal Soul, God. The soul is without beginning and end, and all humans in their essential nature are eternal. Bodies die, but not souls. In truth, bodies come and go according to the laws of nature, but the soul is beyond nature because it is part of the universal Soul, which is deathless and infinite. The Bhagavadgita says: ‘As after rejecting worn-out clothes a man takes up other new ones, likewise, after rejecting worn-out bodies the embodied one unites with other new ones. Weapons do not cut it, fire does not burn it,

water does not moisten it, and air does not dry it.’⁵ Thus, death means merely a change of centre from one body to another. All Hindus, of whatever sect, agree on the doctrine of eternality. And the next thing on which they all agree is reincarnation.

Humans have demonized death as the end of everything, but in reality there is no absolute death. Death is only one of nature’s laws of transformation. If death is looked at from the standpoint of the soul, then it is only a transition from one dwelling to another. The materials

from one body find their way, even after thousands of years, into other bodies. All bodies are built according to the laws of genetics and hereditary transmission and inherit certain qualities and characteristics according to the species.

Another point that all Hindus agree upon is the law of karma. The vast difference between the characters of people is due to the law of karma, which is set in motion by the soul. Karma results again in karma and is carried onwards by the soul to another body, into which it re-embodies. This



‘Savitri, Satyavan, and Yama,’
by M V Dhurandhar, 1924

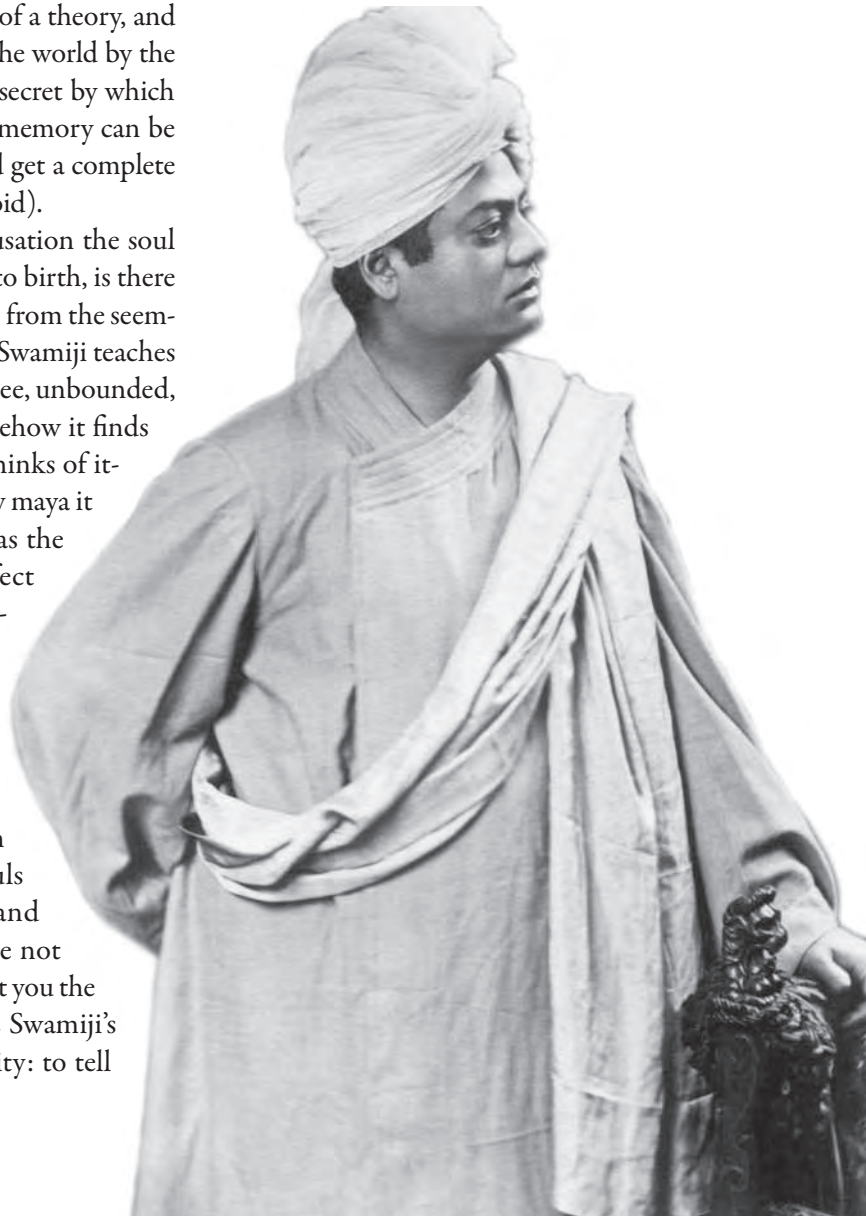
goes on till the soul learns from its mistakes and comes out of nature. Swamiji says: 'A soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency.'⁶

If past lives have an impact upon the present life, why does a person not remember anything? Swamiji answers: 'Consciousness is only the surface of the mental ocean, and within its depths are stored up all our experiences' (1.9). If we can struggle with appropriate efforts, it is possible to bring them out and be conscious of them all. 'Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered that secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up—try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life' (ibid).

If by the law of karma or causation the soul must go on evolving from birth to birth, is there then no escape or hope to be free from the seemingly endless cycle of causation? Swamiji teaches that the soul is, in essence, ever free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow it finds itself tied down to matter and thinks of itself as matter. Being overtaken by maya it takes the reality it experiences as the ultimate Reality. Thus the perfect comes to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter. It is here that Swamiji exhorted souls to throw off this delusion with his stirring words: 'Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter' (1.11). This is Swamiji's greatest contribution to humanity: to tell

us that we are essentially divine and that the laws of karma can be broken.

Another contribution of Swamiji is to show that the universal Self is not only transcendental but also immanent. In fact, all through his teachings he stresses the immanent aspect of God. He says: 'He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful' (ibid.). A person can realize God through purity and unconditional love, and that life should be lived unattached 'like a lotus leaf, which grows



in water but is never moistened by water' (1.12). Swamiji constantly reminds us that the goal of human life is to realize God.

Result of the Thesis

Swamiji's thesis results primarily in the idea that all life is holy and divine. 'Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature' (1.11). Almost all religions teach, in some form or the other, that souls are 'children of God', but they immediately contradict themselves by insisting that people are sinners. Secondly, only those who believe in *their* doctrines can be saved and not others. The first proposition, so noble, is vitiated by the second parochial attitude, which destroys everything that could have become a platform for unprecedented human development. Swamiji's thesis opened up this second factor and stated that all life and

beings are 'children of God', and by nature souls are sinless. For centuries different religions have been fighting among themselves and retarding their development. In this age people laugh when ancient religions want to become exclusive and exclude others.

Swamiji's teachings have resulted in the bringing together of various religions into a common dialogue; they are learning that at the basic level all religions speak the same language and that the encrustation on the surface is due to human folly and selfishness. Interfaith conferences and dialogues are slowly peeling away the encrustations to reveal the truth. This is a great age of religions discovering themselves through other religions.

Throughout his 'Paper on Hinduism', Swamiji consistently pointed out that science and religion were not antagonistic to each other. Both were striving for the same goal: unity. Religion was seeking unity on the spiritual plane; science


was searching unity on the material plane. Both the searches ultimately hinge on unity. One day religion and science will combine into a beautiful harmony. Swamiji says: 'Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal' (1.14). What Swamiji means by the stopping of science is that it will be indistinguishable from the higher unity of religion—physics would merge into metaphysics. As science searches for unity in the external world and religion seeks unity in the internal world, ultimately both will meet, for the distinctions between external and internal will vanish. Scientific and religious unities will merge in the greater unity, which is God.

Once people can understand this basic doctrine of the soul and God, there will come a new age of reconciliation of peoples, of cultures. People will believe in the unity of humankind and not indulge in the petty wars that Samuel Huntington predicted. The problem of defective religious identity, pointed out by Amartya Sen, will also vanish. Societies and cultures will harness their energies in building better societies and cultures, based on the idea of universality. Universality will be the watchword of all progress in the future, because the soul by its nature is universal. Humans will conform their existence to this deepest Truth, which will be a mighty step towards manifesting the inherent Divinity.

One of the main points in Swamiji's thesis is the emphasis on the individual. All dependence on external things is secondary; the primary dependence is on oneself. All the powers that can lead to perfection are within each soul; it only has to manifest those powers. The next point Swamiji emphasized is that the grand function of every religion, not just of Hinduism, was to evolve a God out of the material human. God

is present in every religion, and the more a religion seeks to evolve a God out of the material human, the more it fulfils itself as a religion. It is in such a spirit that he quoted this Gita verse: 'I am in every religion as a thread through a string of pearls. Wherever, thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know that I am there' (1.18).

In presenting the essentials of Hinduism Swamiji gave to humanity a larger and newer concept of humankind, society, world, and religion. Swamiji's proclamation before the world that Divinity is one's real nature gives humankind the philosophy and the aspiration towards fulfilling that goal. It also makes us see our fellow human beings in the best light possible. All the different concepts of humans such as fighting, quarrelling, evil, and so on are merely surface views. Even evil people believed in this surface reality. Through the idea of the inner Divinity in all we can look at humans differently, we can remove our limitation by becoming our real Self.

Swamiji's fervent prayer on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions is meant for humanity: 'I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal' (1.4). 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.4.
2. See Samuel P Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
3. Dr Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).
4. *Complete Works*, 1.7.
5. Bhagavadgita, 2.22–3.
6. *Complete Works*, 1.8–9.

Swami Vivekananda's Views on Superconsciousness

Dr R Lekshmi

THE CONCEPT OF CONSCIOUSNESS has become very important in today's studies and research. Philosophers, cognitive scientists, psychoanalysts, and neurobiologists, who study the mind and brain, find themselves in a vast field with many labyrinths. This is an exciting time for humanity, for new discoveries are giving new insights into what humanity really is. Many philosophers, psychologists, and scientists have taken a reductionist approach to explain consciousness, while Indian philosophers, with a few exceptions, have taken an anti-reductionist approach. Interestingly, for the great philosopher Swami Vivekananda, it is superconsciousness and not consciousness that is the most important thing to understand. Hence, there arises the need to discuss the problem of consciousness against the backdrop of what Swamiji taught.

Two Approaches

Whether attributes like thinking, feeling, willing, and perceiving, which are typical of the conscious mind, can be legitimately assigned to machines like computers has been strongly debated by different philosophers and cognitive scientists. Some of those who champion artificial intelligence (AI) hold that consciousness occurs as a function of living tissues in the brain, and such functions can be reproduced in computing machines. On the other hand, some argue that consciousness is a distinct entity not identifiable with anything physical or mechanical. In other words, while the advocates of AI take the reductionist stand, the



Dr R Lekshmi is assistant professor of Philosophy at the Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram.



Nataraja Shiva

critics of AI take the anti-reductionist one. No doubt consciousness, as a by-product of matter, has received serious blows from recent developments in the field of science itself. Reductionists and others are also vexed with the problem of how objective phenomena can produce subjective experiences.

For Indian philosophers and metaphysicians, consciousness is the *svarupa*, real nature

or essence, of human beings. This consciousness is called the Atman, which is neither physical nor mechanical but is Satchidananda, existence-consciousness-bliss. Therefore, consciousness cannot be reduced to physical states. Sankhya philosophers, Vedantists, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo all agree upon the non-reductionist view of consciousness. Their knowledge comes from direct experience.

An ordinary person thinks her or his consciousness is limited to the brain or the mind. Swamiji speaks of an infinite consciousness: 'Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but the centre is located in one spot; and God is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere. ... Man can become like God and acquire control over the whole universe if he multiplies his centre of self-consciousness.'¹ Hence, he said: 'Consciousness, therefore is the chief thing to understand' (ibid.).

The Self-evident Ontological Truth

According to Swamiji, the awareness of consciousness is the most self-evident among all the truths. Philosophers like René Descartes concluded that the self-evident 'I think, therefore I am' was the foundation for all ontological and epistemological considerations. But that is just the starting point! Swamiji says: 'When you think of yourself as body, you forget that you are a mind, and when you think yourself as mind, you will forget the body. There is only one thing, that you are' (2.31). He continues: 'Life is such a wonderful reality that you cannot for a moment forget it. You may as well doubt that you exist. This is the first fact of consciousness—I am. Who can imagine a state of things which never existed? It is the most self-evident of all truths' (2.32). From these statements of Swamiji we can derive the existence of consciousness as the foundational axiom of all our epistemological and metaphysical thinking.

But the above thesis does not stop here, for consciousness has many levels. 'In my own body, and in all our bodies, we must all admit that we are conscious of very little of the body, and of the greater part of it we are unconscious. Yet it exists. Nobody is ever conscious of his brain' (4.195). If ordinary waking consciousness is not coexistent

with our existence, then it must be something that is only at the peripheral level of our being! Swamiji says: 'Consciousness is only the surface of the mental ocean, and within its depths are stored up all our experiences' (1.9). Explaining this fact he says: 'I am now speaking English. It is not my mother tongue, in fact, no words of my mother tongue are now present in my consciousness; but let me try to bring them up, and they rush in' (ibid.).

If consciousness is only the name of the surface level of the mind, then it necessarily presupposes that there is something else that is at a much deeper level of being. Swamiji says: 'Consciousness is a mere film between two oceans, the subconscious and the superconscious' (8.276).

From Consciousness to Superconsciousness

Swamiji could see how people in the future are going to struggle to know what is called consciousness, which after all is only the starting point in the real search for Truth! Swamiji says: 'I could not believe my own ears when I heard Western people talking so much of consciousness! Consciousness? What does consciousness matter! Why, it is nothing as compared with unfathomable depths of the subconscious and the heights of the superconscious!' (Ibid.).

All the ratiocinations that the reductionists are indulging in are only superfluous, for they are only scratching the surface with their intelligence and AI. The deeper levels of consciousness cannot be discovered by logic and reason. Consciousness has a transcendent metaphysical realm. 'The field of religion is beyond our senses, beyond even our consciousness. ... Consciousness is only one of the many planes in which we work; you will have to transcend the field of consciousness, to go beyond the senses, approach nearer and nearer to your own centre,

and as you do that, you will approach nearer and nearer to God. ... It is supersensuous, superconscious' (1.415).

To reach superconsciousness humans have to take a long journey, an inward journey, from the unconscious to the conscious, and ultimately to the superconscious. The first step in the journey is the control of the unconscious. It may seem strange that we have to control the unconscious mind. This step in the process is indispensable, for the cause of the unconscious is the conscious mind. The unconscious thoughts are the submerged millions of our old conscious thoughts. Therefore, after first controlling the unconscious one has to go beyond the conscious. Swamiji says: 'This is the first part of the study, the control of the unconscious. The next is to go beyond the conscious. Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness. When this superconscious state is reached, man becomes free and divine; death becomes immortality. ... That is the goal, the infinite realm of the superconscious' (2.35).

The above process of moving upwards from the unconscious to the conscious and then the superconscious is a process of evolution. The process of evolution for billions of years slowly pushes life higher and higher. Nobody can dispute the fact of evolution, but Swamiji went one step further to complete the whole picture: he explained that evolution is the counterpart of involution. He says: 'The whole of this life which slowly manifests itself evolves itself from the protoplasm to the perfected human being—the incarnation of God on earth—the whole of this series is but one life' (2.228). What was involved in the beginning? God! This supreme consciousness is slowly uncoiling itself and evolving as life, mind, body, senses, universe, and everything.

IMAGE: 'MORNING DEW', BY TIM DUTTON / FLICKR

Epistemological Issues of Consciousness

Having discussed the logical necessity of evolution with involution, Swamiji probes into the question of the 'knowledge' of the superconscious. Philosophically, it is a truism that a metaphysical account is followed by its corresponding epistemological aspect. As a true philosopher, Swamiji also follows this principle. His definition of knowledge is wonderful: 'Knowledge is pigeonholing a new impression with old ones, recognizing a new impression. What is meant by recognition? Finding associations with similar impressions that one already has. Nothing further is meant by knowledge' (2.448).

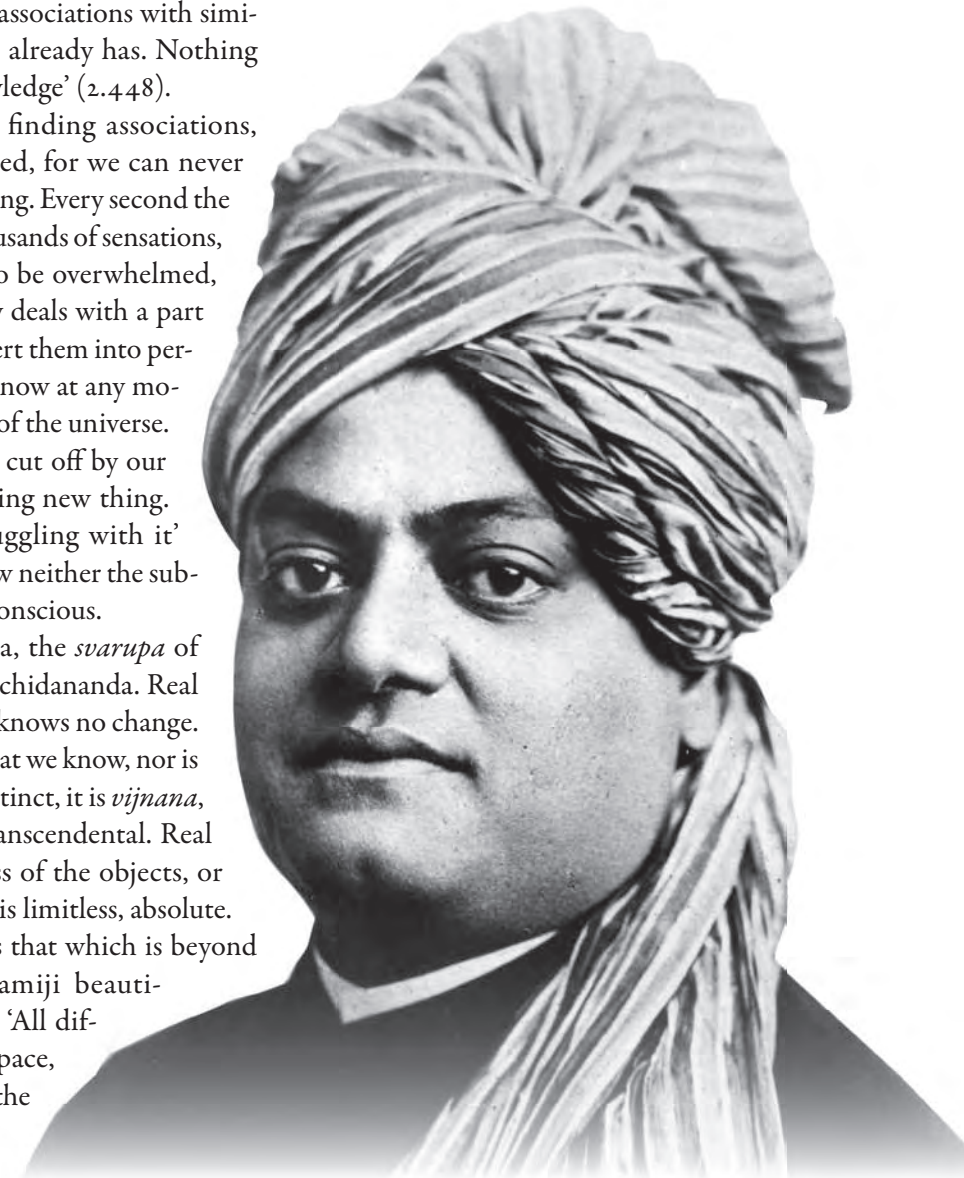
If knowledge means finding associations, then knowledge is limited, for we can never know the whole of anything. Every second the mind is overrun with thousands of sensations, and in order for it not to be overwhelmed, the mind only selectively deals with a part of the sensations to convert them into perception. Thus, what we know at any moment is only a small part of the universe. 'This bit of the universe, cut off by our consciousness, is a startling new thing. ... Therefore, we are struggling with it' (2.449). Besides, we know neither the sub-conscious nor the superconscious.

According to Vedanta, the *svarupa* of every human being is Satchidananda. Real existence is limitless and knows no change. Real knowledge is not what we know, nor is it intuition, reason, or instinct, it is *vijnana*, which is limitless and transcendental. Real bliss is not consciousness of the objects, or the body, or the mind, it is limitless, absolute.

The real knowledge is that which is beyond all differentiation. Swamiji beautifully expresses this idea: 'All difference is due to time, space, and causation. These are the

constituent elements of the mind. No mentality is possible without them. You can never think without time, you can never imagine without space, and you can never have anything without causation. These are the forms of the mind' (2.461). According to Vedanta, it is the mind that has limited, as it were, the Reality.

Therefore, by going beyond the mind, with its limited consciousness, one goes beyond the limitations of time, space, and causation and realizes




the Atman. ‘The material universe is the result of the limited consciousness of man. When man becomes conscious of his divinity, all matter, all nature, *as we know it*, will cease to exist’ (6.97).

In order to reach superconsciousness, one has to make constant efforts in subduing one’s thoughts. Swamiji says: ‘Meditation means the mind is turned back upon itself. The mind stops all the [thought-waves] and the world stops. Your consciousness expands’ (4.235). Again: ‘What we call extraordinary, superconscious inspiration is only the result of a higher development of ordinary consciousness, gained by long and continued effort. The difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary is merely one of degree in manifestation. Conscious efforts lead the way to superconscious illumination’ (4.436–7).

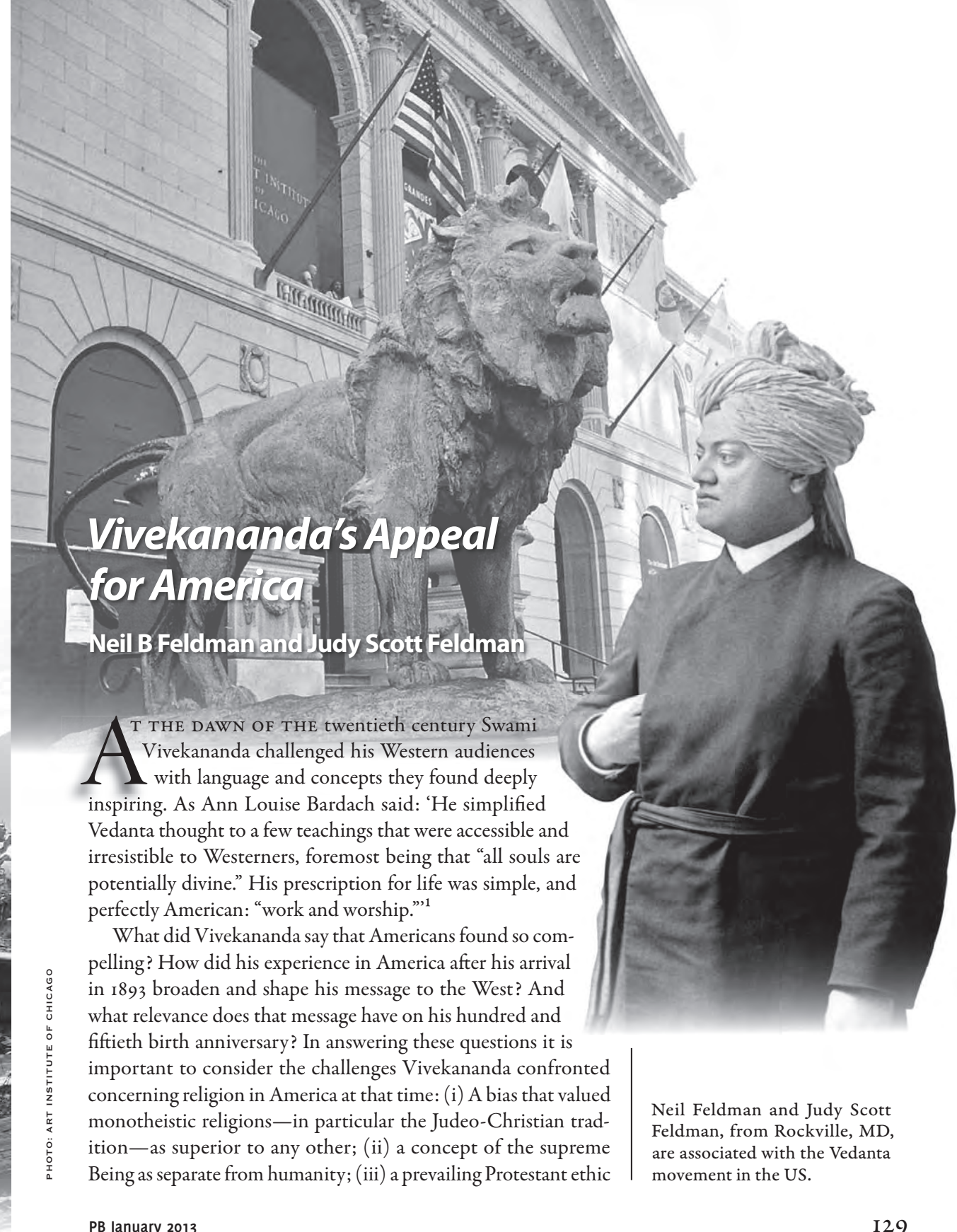
Conclusion

It becomes evident from Swami Vivekananda’s penetrating insight that the Truth, which philosophers, psychologists, neurologists, and other

cognitive scientists should seek, is not consciousness but superconsciousness! Again, this search should never be a form of ‘knowing’ but realizing. All the efforts in understanding the nature of consciousness cannot neglect or reject the many other levels that we are unaware of. For just as the subconscious affects the conscious mind, so also does the superconscious state. Today efforts are directed only to knowing the surface truths of consciousness, and that too with limited intellectual reasoning. Hence, to find an answer to the vexing problems of consciousness, including the gap between the objective world and the subjective experiences, one should dive deep into the superconsciousness. It is only by seeing things from the vantage point of superconsciousness that we can realize that consciousness is palpable in the whole universe. 

Reference

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.33.



Vivekananda's Appeal for America

Neil B Feldman and Judy Scott Feldman

AT THE DAWN OF THE twentieth century Swami Vivekananda challenged his Western audiences with language and concepts they found deeply inspiring. As Ann Louise Bardach said: ‘He simplified Vedanta thought to a few teachings that were accessible and irresistible to Westerners, foremost being that “all souls are potentially divine.” His prescription for life was simple, and perfectly American: “work and worship.”’¹

What did Vivekananda say that Americans found so compelling? How did his experience in America after his arrival in 1893 broaden and shape his message to the West? And what relevance does that message have on his hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary? In answering these questions it is important to consider the challenges Vivekananda confronted concerning religion in America at that time: (i) A bias that valued monotheistic religions—in particular the Judeo-Christian tradition—as superior to any other; (ii) a concept of the supreme Being as separate from humanity; (iii) a prevailing Protestant ethic

Neil Feldman and Judy Scott Feldman, from Rockville, MD, are associated with the Vedanta movement in the US.



that rejected renunciation and monastic retreat from the world; (iv) an unquestioned belief in the authority of divine revelation as recorded in the Bible; and (v) a philosophical divide between science and religion that was growing wider and more pronounced.

In spite of all this Vivekananda would come to believe that their belief in equality, pursuit of freedom, trust in rational thought and science, scepticism of authority, and cooperative spirit made America fertile ground for Vedanta to take root and lead to a rebirth of spirituality in the West.

Vivekananda's Encounter with America

Vivekananda took time to shape what would evolve into his new synthesis of Vedanta. For four years following his triumphant reception at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he travelled and lectured throughout the United States, immersing himself in the US culture. As R K DasGupta points out: 'The West too was in need of a spiritual regeneration. He conceived

his Vedanta with these considerations in his mind.'² During this time Vivekananda would formulate, sharpen, and expound upon what he called 'practical Vedanta' and what DasGupta termed 'neo-Vedanta'. This new synthesis was not simply a restatement of ancient Vedanta but an original and new message that married the wisdom and philosophy of the Upanishads with the rational, scientific, and freedom-based values of Western culture.

Vivekananda's opening address at the parliament was a clarion call for religious understanding and acceptance: 'Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair.'³ Yet he appealed to his audience to help usher in a new age: 'I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all

uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal' (ibid.).

Notable too was what he did not say. He never claimed that his religion was superior to any other or the only path to truth and salvation. Instead, his was an appeal to all religions, and to all men and women, to realize that all their paths and traditions were valid and leading to the same goal.

The Message of Vedanta

As he lectured across the US, Vivekananda's primary goal was to make Vedanta intelligible to Western audiences. He undertook the

monumental task of distilling the vast and complex threads of a profound Eastern philosophy and tradition spanning thousands of years. He extracted its essence while conveying its comprehensiveness, its all-embracing character, and the heights of its discoveries. He spoke eloquently and authoritatively about ideas, ideals, and sources of wisdom that went beyond Western philosophical and religious traditions, to the essence of non-dualism. 'Vedanta teaches the God that is in everyone, has become everyone and everything' (8.125). The enthusiastic reaction to these and other new concepts proved that he made Vedanta understandable, alive, and tangible to his listeners.

From his experience Vivekananda also came to understand the unique task that lay before him. One year after the Parliament he proclaimed in an interview in Brooklyn, New York: 'I have a message to the West just as Buddha had a message to the East' (5.314). In a letter to his American supporter Mary Hale, he wrote: 'I have a message, and I will give it after my own fashion. I will neither Hinduise my message, nor Christianise it, nor make it any "ise" in the world. I will only my-ise it and that is all. *Liberty*, *Mukti*, is all my religion, and everything that tries to curb it, I will avoid by fight or flight' (8.72). Two years later he would write to Margaret Noble, destined to become Sister Nivedita: 'My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life' (7.501).

Vedanta was to be at the core of his message to America. As DasGupta noted, it was only after one year of interacting with Americans that 'Vivekananda thought of preaching Vedanta'⁴ as the philosophical basis of his new synthesis. Practical Vedanta would bridge East and West and free

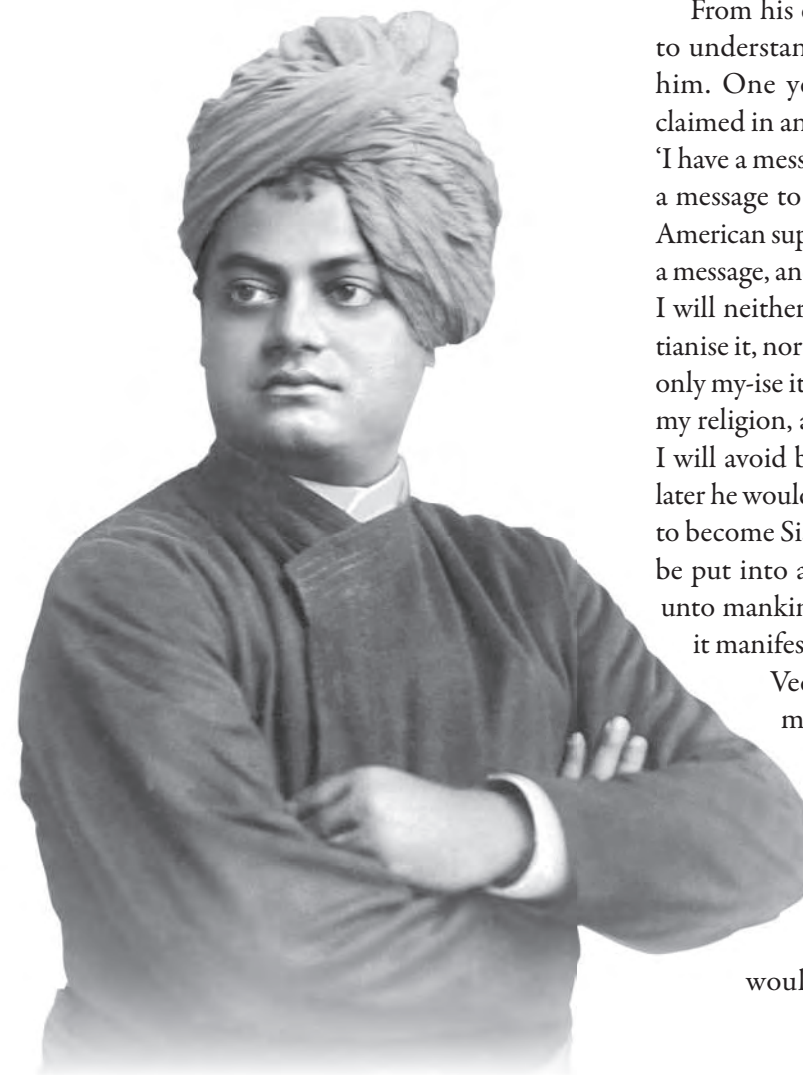


PHOTO: THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION, CHICAGO, 1892-3

adherents from being limited by traditional religious doctrines and cultural practices associated with those traditions. He said: 'One may desire to see again the India of one's books, one's studies, one's dreams. My hope is to see again the strong points of that India, reinforced by the strong points of this age, only in a natural way. The new stage of things must be a *growth* from within. So I preach only the Upanishads. If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upanishads. And of the Upanishads, it is only that One idea strength.'⁵

Strength, Vivekananda said, 'is the medicine for the world's diseases' (2.201). It helps us to see beyond our cultural and religious prejudices. At the very core of Vedanta was the concept that humans were not innately sinful but divine. For those raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition, who had been instructed from their childhood about humanity's fallen and sinful nature as told in the Bible, this was a radical concept. It was liberating, uplifting, and optimistic.

Equality and Freedom

Vivekananda explained that Vedanta was compatible with the core American democratic values of equality and freedom: 'None can be Vedantists and at the same time admit of privilege for anyone, either mental, physical, or spiritual; absolutely no privilege for anyone' (1.423).

But above all, he stated that individual freedom, *mukti*, was the final goal.

The American ideal of equality had special appeal to Vivekananda. He had traversed the vast Indian subcontinent before coming to the US.

He had witnessed the squalid conditions of India's poor and experienced first-hand the gulf separating the elites from the downtrodden. He lamented that the rich and poor would treat him, as a sannyasin, with great respect and hospitality, but would turn a blind eye to those millions suffering at the lowest rungs of society. While he had also encountered inequality in the US, he noted an important difference: Americans saw inequality as a moral failing to be corrected. In his view, this made American society particularly predisposed to Vedanta.

Similarly, Vivekananda held up freedom as essential in Vedanta. In the 'land of the free', religion was an individual choice and a private matter. People were free to choose, change, or even reject religion in their lives. This was another reason Vivekananda believed

America would embrace Vedanta. However, he went much further. He explained to his audiences that liberty was also essential to spiritual growth. Vivekananda elevated the concept of freedom from a political, social, or intellectual ideal to a spiritual one. In the process he challenged Western religion's concept of the fundamental nature of the human being. He explained that true spiritual freedom was freedom from bondage and, 'the main cause of bondage is ignorance. Man is not wicked by his own nature—not at all. His nature is pure, perfectly holy. Each man is Divine. Each man that you see is a God by his very nature. This nature is covered by ignorance, and it is ignorance that binds us down. Ignorance is the cause of all misery' (9.214).

The freedom that Vedanta advocated was a total liberation from the tyranny of the body, the mind, and the senses, that is, from *maya*. 'All our struggle is for freedom. We seek neither misery nor happiness, but freedom' (8.250).

Reason and Beyond

Vivekananda also shared Americans' faith in rational thought and embraced their sceptical attitude toward traditional dogmas, blind beliefs, and authoritarian regimes. He exhorted people to use reason to evaluate the truths of Vedanta and of any religion: 'Stick to your reason until you reach something higher; and you will know it to be higher, because it will not jar with reason' (7.60). Ultimately, reason was the essential tool that would allow the intellect to realize that there was a higher reality beyond the mind and the external world. 'When we rise higher ... we have to get out of the body, out of mind and imagination, and leave this world out of sight. When we rise to be the absolute, we are

no longer in this world—all is Subject, without object' (8.34).

His words were a fundamental challenge to Western religions, which looked to outside authorities such as sacred texts and personalities as the basis for truth and belief. 'Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason, no one knows. If one does not take the standard of reason, there cannot be any true judgment, even in the case of religions' (2.335).

Vivekananda made a distinction between belief and faith. Belief in truths based on external authorities required a suspension of reason. Faith, in contrast, was 'the grasp on the Ultimate, an illumination' (7.60). It is arrived at through the tool of reason and does not contradict reason. In Vedanta 'there is no external test for inspiration, we know it ourselves; our guardian against mistake is negative—the voice of reason. All religion is going beyond reason, but reason is the only guide to get there' (ibid.). Faith is the ultimate step: 'First hear, then reason and find out all that reason can give about the Atman; let the flood of reason flow over It, then take what remains. If nothing remains, thank God you have escaped a superstition' (ibid.).

Vivekananda spoke some of his most scathing words against what he considered to be the 'superstition' of materialism, which led to a belief in a separate God, a God in the clouds ruling over man below. 'What is the idea of God in heaven? Materialism. ... It is all matter, all body idea, the gross idea, the sense idea' (8.126). Beliefs such as these are materialism,

'because they are all based on the consciousness of body, body, body. No spirit there' (8.133). Vivekananda, in contrast, highlighted the spiritual side of religion: 'God is spirit and He should be worshipped in spirit and in truth' (8.126). Vedanta demanded that the Truth be realized inside one's own self.

If any people in the world might embrace reason and reject traditional hierarchies with God as king and humans as subjects, it would be Americans, Vivekananda thought. He pointed out: 'The king is gone from this country [America] at least. ... In this country the king has entered every one of you. You are all kings in this country. So with the religion of Vedanta. You are all Gods' (8.125). He went so far as to suggest 'there is a chance of Vedanta becoming the religion of

your country because of democracy' (8.126), because of America's commitment to reason, equality, and the primacy of the individual.

But he understood the huge challenge ahead. Vedanta called upon Americans to form new attitudes and habits based on questioning sacred texts and instead seeking truth within; faith would be based on ideals and not personalities. He said: 'This makes Vedanta very difficult. It does not teach the old idea of God at all' (8.125). For all books, persons, and personal God must go, including the senses. 'What is the God of Vedanta? He is principle, not person' (8.133).

All Knowledge Is Veda

Vivekananda explained that 'the meaning of the word "Veda", from which the word "Vedanta" comes, is knowledge' (8.136). Vedanta means the final or ultimate knowledge. Speaking to his audiences, Vivekananda said: 'All knowledge is Veda, infinite as God is infinite' (8.136). But he contrasted the knowledge of Vedanta with mere book learning: 'What knowledge? Chemistry? Physics? Astronomy? Geology? They help a little, just a little. But the chief knowledge is that of your own nature. "Know Thyself". You must know what you are, what your real nature is. You must become conscious of the infinite nature within. Then your bondages will burst' (9.214). At that moment, the sense of dualism, the illusion of God separate from the human, would disappear in the realization of the unity of all existence. At that moment would come the realization that 'Unity is knowledge, diversity is ignorance' (8.138).

'Charles Street, Boston', by Maurice Prendergast, c.1895



Vivekananda explained that we falsely see the world as many not one, as matter not spirit. This is because of maya, a beguiling apparitional ignorance that limits consciousness and projects a veil over the reality of Advaita, non-dualism. Sri Ramakrishna had explained that the knowers of Brahman declare that identification of the Atman with the body is the cause of the perception of duality: 'What is spirit? We are all spirit. Why is it we do not realise it? What makes you different from me? Body and nothing else. Forget the body and all is spirit' (8.126). Destroying ignorance meant going beyond good and evil and all duality and to realize the 'One without a second' (8.5) which is eternal, unchanging, and infinite. Until we come to this non-dualistic understanding of Truth, Vivekananda said, the presence of good and evil and all other dualities in the world would always remain a difficult and perplexing issue.

Vivekananda knew how difficult it is to go beyond the phantasm of maya and achieve Advaitic realization. As a young man he had, at first, openly ridiculed Advaitic teachings. He had once joked to a friend, Pratapchandra Hazra: 'How can that be? This jug is God, this cup is God, and we too are God: nothing can be more preposterous.'⁶ Although he observed Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly go into *nirvikalpa* samadhi and heard him describe the unfathomable experience of oneness, it was only after he himself realized such a state that he would begin to speak definitively and from personal experience.

To his audiences, he was blunt about the truth as he knew it: 'There is such a thing as illusion—in it one thing is taken for another: matter is taken for spirit, this body for soul. That is the tremendous illusion. It has to go.'⁷ Yet he consistently promoted this lofty goal and claimed it was feasible to one and all. He proclaimed the hopeful message that a time would come for everyone

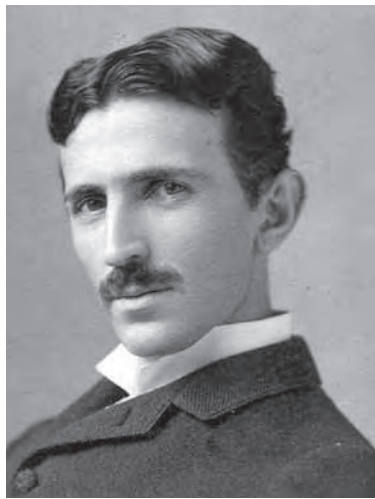
when they would realize their Divinity, for it is their very nature.

Vivekananda had tremendous faith in the power of the knowledge expounded in the Vedanta to transform humankind. He proclaimed that 'knowledge will make the world good. Knowledge will remove all misery. Knowledge will make us free' (9.214). But he also took a realistic view of the struggle to get there. 'If Vedanta—this conscious knowledge that all is one spirit—spreads, the whole of humanity will become spiritual. But is it possible? I do not know. Not within thousands of years. The old superstitions must run out' (8.139). Vivekananda spoke of Vedanta as a revelation continually unfolding. His new synthesis was part of a thread woven into the future. Perhaps this is why Vivekananda, like his Master, never rejected any other religion and heartily encouraged new ones. He said: 'I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship them all ... I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on?' (2.374).

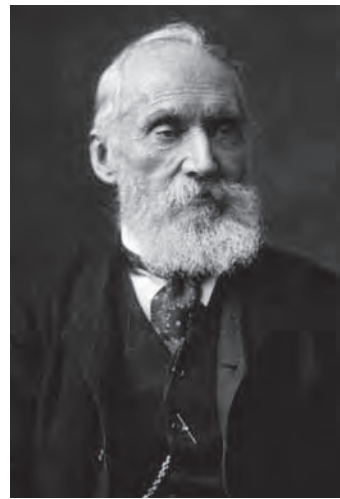
Science and Religion

From the time he set foot on American soil, Vivekananda set out to reconcile Eastern thought and Western science. Most likely his first opportunity came immediately after the parliament, when he was honoured at a reception that included the top scientists of the day. Vivekananda believed that science and Vedanta were parallel and complementary paths to discovering the ultimate Truth. He said: 'Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better' (1.367).

Vivekananda understood that science was exploring only the external world, while



Nikola Tesla

Prof. Hermann
von Helmholtz

Sir William Thompson

Vedanta had already conquered the internal. Nonetheless, neither one should conflict with the other. Both, he explained, were based on the direct experience and authority of the individual and rational thought. He believed science could prove the same truths. He wrote to his disciple E T Sturdy: 'I am working a good deal now upon the cosmology and eschatology of the Vedanta. I clearly see their perfect union with modern science, and the elucidation of the one will be followed by that of the other. I intend to write a book later on in the form of questions and answers' (5.101-2). Sadly, Vivekananda did not do so before his death in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine.

Comparing the two disciplines he said: 'Science and religion are both attempts to help us out of the bondage; only religion is the more ancient, and we have the superstition that it is the more holy. In a way it is, because it makes morality a vital point, and science does not' (7.103). Vivekananda understood that scientists would first have to turn their investigative eyes within and on the subject—on consciousness itself. He believed that when they did, they would discover that logic, reason, and intellectual knowledge

were insufficient to reveal the Truth. Only then would they see the need for moral and spiritual discipline as a prerequisite in their research.

To test his concept of the convergence of Vedanta and science, Vivekananda sought out the top scientists of the day, including Nikola Tesla, Professor Hermann von Helmholtz, Sir William Thompson—Lord Kelvin—and others. He enquired Tesla whether he could show 'that force and matter are reducible to potential energy' (5.101). Tesla believed he could prove this mathematically but failed. It would not be until after Vivekananda's death that Einstein arrived at it in his famous equation, $E=mc^2$.

Exploring the intersection of science and Vedanta, Vivekananda was able to accurately predict modern scientific insights a decade before Einstein's discoveries starting in 1905. Thanks to Einstein, the separation between time and space would be erased, while mass and energy would be proved to be equivalent. Today quantum physicists struggle to comprehend the strange implications of how matter can be measured to be both a particle and a wave and how subjective consciousness literally creates what is measured to be 'real' on the subatomic level.

Modern physics has proved that nothing in this universe is as it appears to be—that it is all a kind of illusion, just as Vivekananda predicted. The objective universe as perceived through the senses defies all notions of common sense. 'The senses cheat you day and night. Vedanta found that out ages ago; modern science is just discovering the same fact. ... No two people see the same world. The highest knowledge will show that there is no motion, no change in anything; that the very idea of it is all Maya' (7.74). Today the study of consciousness still beckons and is being heard.

Worship of God in Humans

Perhaps Vivekananda's most profound legacy was his ideal of performing work as worship of God in humans, a legacy that has been neglected in America. This was his radical application of Advaita Vedanta to the practical experience of everyday life and the world. Mundane work could thus be transformed into sadhana. He said: 'We must become thinkers. Every birth is painful. We must get out of materialism. ... This struggle is all the worship there is; all the rest is mere shadow. You are the Personal God. Just now I am worshiping you. This is the greatest prayer. Worship the whole world in that sense—by serving it' (8.135).

One aspect of 'work as worship' was non-attachment, an ancient concept described in the Bhagavadgita. 'Doing work is not religion, but work done rightly leads to freedom' (7.69). Vivekananda explained that work 'done rightly' means work done as service to God and with complete non-attachment to its results: 'This is the one central idea in the Gita: work incessantly, but be not attached to it' (1.53).

An even more significant aspect was that work was to be performed as worship of God in his highest temple: a human being. This ideal was

inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, who proclaimed: 'Not compassion to Jivas but service to them as Shiva.'⁸ Hearing these words from his Master, Vivekananda realized how the philosophy of Vedanta could be put into practice. He said he would 'proclaim everywhere in the world this wonderful truth that I have heard today' (ibid.).

Vivekananda believed this worship of God in humans was vital for the entire world. In March 1894 he wrote from Chicago to his disciple 'Kidi', Singaravelu Mudaliar: 'We believe that it is the duty of every soul to treat, think of, and behave to other souls as such, i.e. as Gods, and not hate or despise, or vilify, or try to injure them by any manner or means. This is the duty not only of the Sannyasin, but of all men and women.'⁹ While this idea has been taken up in India by institutions dedicated to service, education, and relief work, it was never attempted in America and so it remains an untested element of Vivekananda's message for Americans.

New Synthesis for the West

While in America, Vivekananda would return again and again to the American values of equality and freedom, and to the Western faith in reason, science, and personal experience as the basis to realize God. He constantly challenged conventional notions of religious authority. He urged his audience to evolve, to wake up, to 'Vedantize' their understanding of spirituality. He gave them ammunition to challenge major superstitions, materialism, and to question those authorities that demanded blind belief. He prodded them to apply reason to religion just as in all other aspects of life, and to recognize that science and religion are not separate disciplines but parallel tracks leading to the same truths. Ultimately, practical Vedanta, he said, would lead to the realization of God in humans and to the practice in daily life of work as worship.

He understood the revolutionary nature of what he was advocating to his audiences. Practical Vedanta required nothing less than a total change of mentality towards the world: from dualism to non-dualism and from materialism to the realization that all is Atman. He said: 'How can the rich man turn up his nose at the poor man, and the learned at the ignorant, if we are all spirit and all the same? Unless society changes, how can such a religion as Vedanta prevail? It will take thousands of years to have large numbers of truly rational human beings. It is very hard to show men new things, to give them great ideas. It is harder still to throw off old superstitions, very hard; they do not die easily' (8.136).

Vivekananda believed the time for Vedanta in the West had come, and that if there was any hope for a religion based on practical Vedanta, it was in America. He urged Americans to embrace his new synthesis and to begin a spiritual regeneration that could eventually spread throughout the entire world.

The Legacy of Neo-Vedanta

Vivekananda's participation in the World

Parliament of Religions was historically fitting. It coincided with the Columbian Exposition also being held in Chicago in commemoration of Columbus's arrival on the shores of America four centuries earlier. Columbus's voyage of discovery had opened up the New World to refugees from Europe seeking freedom from political and religious persecution. Vivekananda brought another message of freedom to America: freedom as the means to and the goal of spiritual realization. Just as the highest power in American democracy is the individual, so the highest authority in knowing God, he would preach, also lay within each individual.

When he arrived in America, Vivekananda had only a limited idea of the scope of the mission he would be taking on. He came in hopes that America might provide some material support to India, which though rich in ancient spiritual traditions, could not progress until its material miseries were alleviated. But he soon realized, from the resounding reception he enjoyed, that America was also ripe for a spiritual regeneration.

PHOTO: THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION, CHICAGO, 1892-3



After his inaugural speech at Chicago, he established a bridge between the East and the West and became a celebrity. When he left the US he had developed practical Vedanta as a philosophy suitable for the modern world. By the time of his untimely death on 4 July 1902—America's Independence Day—Vivekananda had won countless supporters and inspired followers all over the world.

America played a crucial role in shaping Vivekananda's new synthesis of Eastern and Western thought. Vivekananda had been energized by the dynamism of the young country. He believed that the absence of social hierarchies, along with the embrace of equality, freedom, reason, and science, made the US the perfect environment for the flowering of modern Vedanta. In his 1900 talk in San Francisco 'Is Vedanta the Future Religion?', at the end of his second visit, he was optimistic but realistic about those prospects. He said: 'This Vedanta is everywhere, only you must become conscious of it. These masses of foolish beliefs and superstitions hinder us in our progress' (8.139).

His words were prophetic. Today Vivekananda's democracy-inspired message of Vedanta has been all but forgotten in America—along with the memory of his dramatic influence on early twentieth century thought and culture. As the world grows ever more inhospitable and in need of an ambitious spiritual renaissance based in reason and strength, Vivekananda's grand experiment—Vedanta for the West—has yet to be tested.

The Future of Vedanta in America

America today is still in need of hearing the message of practical Vedanta. Traditional religions seem to be losing relevance. Many Americans are seeking new forms of prayer and worship, often turning to Eastern traditions. Democratic

principles are weakening as the nation responds to social and political upheavals at home and around the world. The notion of equality for all is under assault as the gaps between the ultra-wealthy, middle class, and poor widens. US's domination of the world economy and leadership in science, education, and technology are being openly challenged across the globe. Amidst these trends, Vivekananda's words and message, presented anew, may inspire Americans today as much as they did in his day.

Vivekananda showed how Vedanta could achieve a new synthesis, but it is up to Americans to turn that ideal into a reality. Vedanta *by* Americans *for* Americans was a concept understood by Swami Saradeshananda, a direct disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, who once predicted that 'Vedanta will begin to succeed in America only when Americans are teaching it.'¹⁰ In order to achieve that success, there are number of actions Americans can take to begin Vivekananda's grand experiment.

One would be for Americans to establish, for the first time, service institutions committed to Vivekananda's ideal of work as worship of God in humans. Countless institutions in America do exemplary service work, but all these lack the unique spiritual attitude advocated by Vivekananda. New institutions can be established throughout the country and led by dedicated people from all walks of life. In this way, entire communities committed to practical Vedanta will emerge and grow.


A second action would be for women to take a leadership role in practical Vedanta. This could include establishing and working in the proposed service institutions and lecturing and teaching practical Vedanta to Americans of all ages. Vivekananda advocated a strong, independent place for women in society and religion. He had been inspired by Sri Sarada

Devi, who he honoured as the living embodiment of the Divine Mother. In America Vivekananda's interactions with accomplished women gave him added insight that women, freed from control by male authorities, would be a crucial component in any spiritual regeneration to come. He said: 'All the mischief to women has come because men undertook to shape the destiny of women.'¹¹

Vivekananda made clear that his mission would remain unfinished until women established their own, independent work. At Pasadena, in early 1900, Vivekananda said:

I am glad to tell you that I have made a rude beginning. But the same work I want to do, on parallel lines, for women. And my principle is: each one helps himself. My help is from a distance. There are Indian women, English women, and I hope American women will come to take up the task. As soon as they have begun, I wash my hands of it. No man shall dictate to a woman; nor a woman to a man. Each one is independent. ... Women will work out their own destinies—much better, too, than men can ever do for them (8.91).

A third action would be to begin to engage in an exploration of the 'science of the subject'. Vivekananda wanted scientists to examine the truths revealed in the ancient Vedanta, but this challenge has not been taken up by contemporary researchers. If anything, the divide between religion and science is more pronounced than ever. Science today still lacks the personal moral dimension that Vivekananda saw as basic to the study of consciousness from within. Scientists will need to test the assumption that consciousness is simply a by-product of biochemistry, that is, of matter. Doing so will open new dimensions of research and knowledge. Scientists will have to finally go beyond exploring the objective world based solely on external observation.

The sesquicentenary of Swami Vivekananda's birth heralds an opportunity for Americans to honour his great legacy by launching practical Vedanta in America. America was born out of a revolution. Vivekananda's message to America was revolutionary in his day and it is still revolutionary in ours. He attempted to enact a grand experiment stretching over the next millennia: 'Dualistic ideas have ruled the world long enough, and this is the result. Why not make a new experiment?' (2.200). He believed that Americans were uniquely equipped to orchestrate the experiment, but only if they could overcome the superstition of materialism. He said: 'The teachings of Vedanta ... were never really experimented with before. Although Vedanta is the oldest philosophy in the world, it has always become mixed up with superstitions and everything else. ... The hour comes when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful the true religion, the worship of the spirit by the spirit' (8.141). 

References

1. Ann Louise Bardach, 'How Yoga Won the West', *The New York Times*, 1 October 2011.
2. R K DasGupta, *Philosophy & Philosophers* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2008), 147.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.4.
4. *Philosophy & Philosophers*, 154.
5. *Complete Works*, 8.266–7.
6. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.96.
7. *Complete Works*, 8.112.
8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.523.
9. *Complete Works*, 4.357.
10. Spoken to the author and three other Americans during an interview with the swami in Vrindaban on 8 December 1973.
11. *Complete Works*, 8.91.

Vivekananda's Rereading of Vedanta

Swami Narasimhananda

ONE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S missions was to reinterpret and rejuvenate Vedanta for the modern times. His rereading of Vedanta, also called neo-Vedanta by some, bridges the microcosm and the macrocosm by showing that the transcendental Reality is immanent in each individual. The Upanishadic statement: 'Tat tvam asi; you are That', is brought home effortlessly and given a practical dimension assuring us that Truth is within everyone's reach. With Vivekananda not only 'Hinduism had been created'¹ but Vedanta was given an expansive form encompassing all thoughts and faiths while welcoming new ones. He translated Vedanta into a language of freedom making it relevant to life. No one was worthless; every individual was a peephole to the infinite. The final merging of the finite individual into the infinite is not an act of choice, it is inevitable, for the individual's real nature is infinite.

Vedanta is broadly classified into dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism. While dualism and qualified non-dualism are based on concepts of a supreme God external to the jiva, individual self, non-dualism affirms the unity of the individual self and supreme Self. However, traditional non-dualism establishes this unity through a process of negation of the gross, subtle, and causal universe. If not practised in

Swami Narasimhananda is a monk at Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.



the proper spirit, this makes people apathetic to suffering by turning away from the grim realities of mundane life. The three main schools of Vedanta are portrayed as watertight by their adherents. Any attempt to synthesize them is scoffed at as a dilution and travesty of the philosophies. Consequently, these schools have traditionally remained at loggerheads with one another. While volumes have been written to establish the differences between them, little effort has been made to find similarities. It was left to Vivekananda and his inspiring words spoken with authority harmonized these three philosophies and thus redefined Vedanta for today.

Traditional Vedanta and Neo-Vedanta

To Vivekananda, Advaita Vedanta, non-dualism, was a universal philosophy not constrained by a particular religion, time, or space. He changed it from the traditional life-negation to life-affirmation and offered hope in finding the truth here and now. Vivekananda's Vedanta is not different from the traditional Vedanta but is its fulfilment. A philosopher summarizes thus: 'The neo-Vedanta is also Advaita inasmuch as it holds that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is one without a second (*ekam evadvitiyam*). But as distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Shankara, it is a synthetic Vedanta which reconciles Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism and also

other theories of reality. So also it may be called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified and qualityless (*saguna* and *nirguna*), it has forms and is also formless (*sakara* and *nirakara*).'² Vivekananda showed us that the apparent and the real were two sides of the same coin; that the snake and the rope had the same substratum, that there was no phenomenon without the noumenon. Instead of harping on the unreality of the phenomenon, he wanted us to delve into the noumenon, the substratum.

He stressed on the spiritual identity of the individual. He wanted us to be strong and free from all false humility, mystery-mongering, and self-deprecating ideas, which kills faith in oneself. According to him: 'He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself.'³ To Vivekananda all progress began with self-effort but the constant harping of individuals being nobodies was the cause of denigration of the human spirit. Hence Vivekananda ventured to revive the glory of the individual, which had been lost in doctrines that preached dependence, servility, and insignificance. The immortality of the Self was upheld and damnations and sins were denounced: 'Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature' (1.11).

Almost all of the traditional spiritual disciplines situate the truth outside the individual—the devotee was relegated to an inferior position and this relegation was itself considered a great spiritual practice. This approach was more objective than subjective. Vivekananda turned the emphasis back on the individual: 'Studying the external alone, man begins to feel himself to be nothing ... Therefore, it is not the study

of external nature that makes [one] strong. But there is the internal nature of man—a million times more powerful than any volcanic eruption or any law of nature—which conquers nature, triumphs over all its laws. And that alone teaches man what he is' (9.214). Vivekananda decried all forms of self-negation thus:

We have had weeping enough; no more is this the time for us to become soft. This softness has been with us till we have become like masses of cotton and are dead. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. That is what we want, and that can only be created, established, and strengthened by understanding and realising the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all (3.190).

He stressed the need to turn the individual self away from unresponsive gods: 'You have cried to all the gods in the world. Has misery ceased? The masses in India cry to sixty million gods, and still die like dogs. Where are these gods? ... The gods come to help you when you have succeeded. So what is the use? ... This bending the knee to superstitions, this selling yourself to your own mind does not befit you, my soul. You are infinite, deathless, birthless.' (1.461).

This divinity of the self and the eradication of the distinction between the one and many could be considered the core teaching of Vivekananda. Sister Nivedita put it eloquently:

Swami Vivekananda who, while proclaiming the sovereignty of the Advaita philosophy, as including that experience in which all is one, without a second, also added to Hinduism the doctrine that Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita are but three phases or stages in a single

development, of which the last-named constitutes the goal. This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that the many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes; or as Sri Ramakrishna expressed the same thing, 'God is both with form and without form. And He is that which includes both form and formlessness.'

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, science, and religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita' (I.xv-xvi).

To Vivekananda the jiva was journeying to its real individuality. Lest we mistake the nature of the individuality he clarified it: 'In time we are to be individuals. But in what sense? What is the individuality of man? Not Tom Brown, but God in man. That is the [true] individuality. The more man has approached that, the more he has

given up his false individuality. The more he tries to collect and gain everything [for himself], the less he is an individual. The less he has thought of [himself], the more he has sacrificed all individuality during his lifetime, ... the more he is an individual. This is one secret the world does not understand' (2.467-8).

Serving God in Humans: A Unique Philosophy

The general idea of seva, service, is that of well-off people helping the underprivileged. Vivekananda's idea of seva was that of serving the divinity inherent in all beings. So, seva was not just helping others but a worship and also the service of one's extended self. Swami Ranganathananda said:

Other human beings constituting the social environment are not just objects, are not just extensions of his natural environment, but are subjects like oneself; *ethics, therefore, asks man to detach himself from his physical self and to view the social environment as it is in itself.* This detachment helps him to liberate his higher self and view his social environment objectively. He then discovers anew that social environment consists not of objects but of subjects like himself. This is the discovery that led man to culture and civilization, to ethics and spiritual realization, that led him on the specifically human road of evolution.⁴

Vivekananda spoke about this spirit of seva:

Look upon every man, woman, and every one as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. ... Do it only as a worship. I should see God in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I go and worship them. The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper, and the sinner! Bold are my words; and let me



repeat that it is the greatest privilege in our life that we are allowed to serve the Lord in all these shapes.⁵

Vivekananda also converted the traditional four yogas into wonderful spiritual disciplines suited for the age. And this could be considered one of his significant contributions to Vedanta. He synthesized physiology, psychology, philosophy, and spirituality by making it easy and modern for the believers. Moreover, even atheists could practise yogas like karma and raja. The four yogas, he showed, are different facets of the human personality that can lead one to self-realization. The emotional, intellectual, active, and psychic faculties of the mind are channelled in bhakti, jnana, karma, and raja yogas respectively. A synergy of these yogas could quicken the attainment of the goal.

Closer to the Upanishads

Vivekananda's approach was closer to the spirit

of the scriptures—free from some conflicting meanings of the commentaries—and thus was a lucid exposition of Vedanta. He also wanted us to go to the original texts and find out the meaning for ourselves: 'Go back to your Upanishads—the shining, the strengthening, the bright philosophy—and part from all these mysterious things, all these weakening things. Take up this philosophy; the greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence. The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them' (3.225). He asked us: 'We need not go into text-torturing, we need not go into any sort of religious dishonesty, we need not go into any sort of grammatical twaddle, we need not go about trying to put our own ideas into texts which were never meant for them' (3. 397).

Sri Ramakrishna reaffirmed and powered Vedantic traditions and Vivekananda gave us that relevant message. Speaking of the universality of Vedanta he said:

All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in

its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations. You will find that although the philosophy is the same, the Shaktas, Shaivas, etc. apply it each to their own special cult and *forms*' (5.81-82).

Vedanta as envisioned by Vivekananda was thus the entire gamut of *religion*. After establishing it spiritually, intellectually, and morally,



Illustration on palm leaf

Vivekananda wanted to establish it scripturally, based on the major commentaries of the Acharyas Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. He intended 'to write a book ... on the Vedanta philosophy' (8.341), but alas could not complete this work. But this instead of being a loss has become an advantage, for by his life and works he left us the necessary framework for us to fill in the details and personalize Vedanta according to our individual needs and orientation.

Traditional spiritual practices were distinctively compartmentalized as spiritual and secular. One spent time in the morning and evening for spiritual practices and the rest of the day was seen as being spent on pursuits which were worldly. The aspirants were divided between the spiritual and the worldly. By putting human life in the right perspective, Vivekananda erased this division. According to him, life was a continuum of striving towards perfection. All beings, even a worm, are progressing towards unity: 'The veriest worm will attain divinity, nay, is actually attaining it; you have got eyes, and don't you see it?' (6.294). According to him: 'Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth—but it is never from error to truth' (2.365).

In the words of Swami Ranganathananda:

We should distinguish between mere ethnical religion and spirituality, between static piety and dynamic spirituality. Religion as static piety means only that our name will appear in a particular column of the census register, as a member of a particular religious community, for instance, as a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian. We can all become this without any effort; we are all merely born into such religious communities. But so far as spirituality is concerned, we obtain it by *seeking* and *inquiry*; by such seeking, we grow, we develop, we unfold some profound truth hidden within us. This is what makes religion a science; nobody is born


into physics or chemistry or other sciences; we seek it and achieve it.⁶

Vivekananda wanted Vedanta to be brought out of ancient texts and given a dynamic form, a form that reveals the infinite nature of the individual. He exhorted: 'These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying. They call to every man, woman, and child whatever be their occupation, wherever they may be. And what is there to fear?' (3.245).

While traditional doctrines insisted more on the precept than on the practice, for Vivekananda both the practice and the precept were important. Rather, he stressed more on practice: 'Religion is realisation; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion' (2.396). Though the world has yet to imbibe the dynamism of Vivekananda's wisdom, the work has already begun. His rereading of Vedanta has already started manifesting in the form of coming together of people of different religions, and also of science and Vedanta.

Vivekananda's rereading of Vedanta has been considered as a new school of thought by some philosophers: 'This may be taken as one of the best commentaries on the Vedanta. It synthesizes in a simple, straight, and sweet manner all the previous ones, bringing out their infinite wealth, inner beauty, and inherent glory. Swamiji had the head of Shankara and the heart of Sri Chaitanya; the eyes of a Monist and the hands of a Monotheist; the tenacity of a scholar



world—giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us—and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone.’⁸ This is the language of freedom that humankind can understand and respond to. This rereading of Vedanta is Vivekananda’s great contribution to the age and to humanity. 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.x.
2. Dr Satischandra Chatterjee, ‘Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedantism and its Practical Application’ in *Vivekananda: The Great Spiritual Teacher* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 255.
3. *Complete Works*, 2.301.
4. Swami Ranganathananda, *Philosophy of Service* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2007), 21.
5. *Complete Works*, 3.246.
6. Swami Ranganathananda, *Eternal Values for a Changing Society*, 4 vols (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1993), 2.536.
7. Dr Roma Chaudhuri, ‘Vivekananda: His Place in Indian Philosophy’ in *Vivekananda: The Great Spiritual Teacher*, 295.
8. *Complete Works*, 2.146.

and the tenderness of a lover; the devotion of a Theist and the spirit of service of a Humanist. We may call his interpretation of the Vedanta doctrine by a new name, “Manavadvaita-vada” or “Humanistic Monism”. For who has sung “*manava-mahatmya*” or the glory of man in sweeter tunes than he?’⁷

Traditional Vedanta considered the world as unreal; Vivekananda’s Vedanta deified the world: ‘The Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of the Vedanta. But, at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification of the



The Growing Relevance of Vedanta

Dr Karan Singh

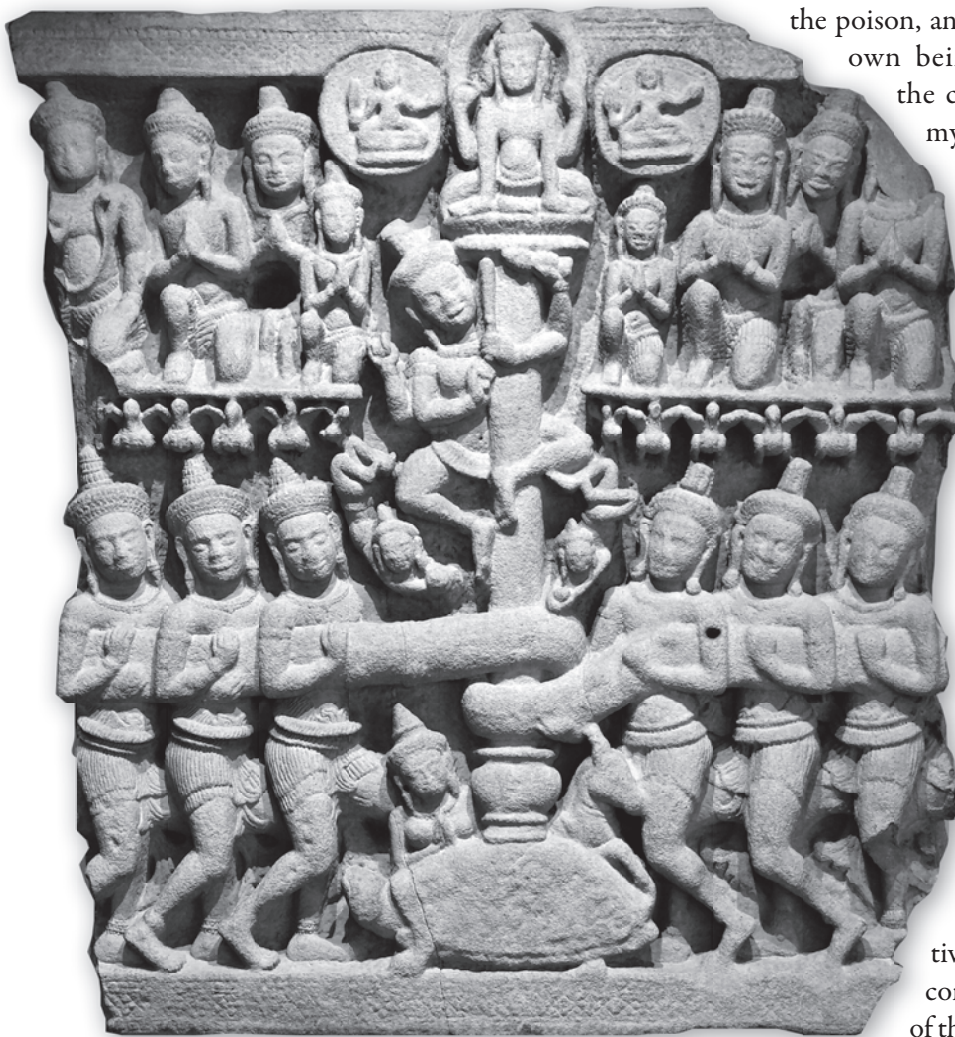
VEDANTA HAS BECOME particularly relevant to humankind in this period of significant transition from being local to being global. We may be too close to the transition to grasp its full significance, but what is quite clear now is that we are in the throes of a major movement that is leading us to a global society. Whether it is in the field of politics, economics, communications, or culture, a powerful new globalism is fast developing. Even in science, with the impact of post-Einsteinian physics, quantum mechanics, Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, many other conceptual revolutions, and the discovery of the boson particle, the old classical structures have begun to crumble, solid matter dissolves into probability waves, and the new physics seems to be approaching the mystic vision of which seers and sages of all traditions have spoken about.

Human consciousness is reflecting its evolutionary situation, and we could say that at this crucial transition humankind is searching for a new philosophy, a new paradigm, that replaces the old. It is no coincidence that this is happening at a juncture when humanity is in peril—not from other species, not from outer space, but from itself. There has been a tragic divergence between knowledge and wisdom, and from deep within the human psyche there has developed a terrible poison that threatens not only our own generation but future ones, and not only humans but all life on earth.

Ancient myths often illuminate the human predicament. There is the powerful Puranic myth of *samudra-manthana*, the churning of the milk-ocean, which speaks to us across millennia and



Dr Karan Singh is a member of parliament, Rajya Sabha, and president of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, and recipient of the Padma Vibhushan.



Fragment of a lintel from Phnom Da, Cambodia, depicting the 'Churning of the Sea of Milk', c.12 cent.

symbolizes the long and tortuous evolution of consciousness on planet earth. In this story devas and asuras—the bright and the dark forces—collaborated in churning the ocean to bring out the jar of *amrita*, ambrosia. Many other gifts came out from this churning, which were shared among both the groups. But at one point a terrible poison emerged that threatened the entire cosmos. Devas and asuras fled in terror. Then the great god Shiva, who is far above the duality and materialism of devas and asuras appeared, drank

the poison, and integrated it into his own being. Only then could the churning resume. This myth vividly illustrates the present-day human predicament. Prolonged churning has given humans breakthroughs and numerous gifts to medicine, communications, agriculture, electronics, space travel, cybernetics, wealth, and prosperity. And yet surely the poison is also upon us. Billions are spent every day on the manufacture of monstrous weapons with unprecedented power of destruction.

It is in this chilling context that the necessity for an alternative philosophy of life becomes important. Because of the universal values that it enshrines, Vedanta represents precisely such an integrated and universal system. Based upon the collective wisdom of generations of seers, sages, and scriptures, it stands as a testimony to the magnificent spiritual endeavour and achievement of ancient India. This vast corpus of wisdom provides insights that can be of crucial value for the survival of the human race in this nuclear age. While the field is extremely broad and rich, I have abstracted six major principles of Vedanta that can collectively provide the framework for the emerging global consciousness on our planet.

Six Principles of Vedanta

The first and most basic concept is that of the transcendental yet all-pervading Brahman: '*Isha vasyam idam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat*; all this—whatsoever moves on the earth—should be covered by the Lord.'¹ And not just earth but all of creation. This tiny solar system along with billions of galaxies in the universe is permeated by the same divine power of the Lord. All that has been, is and will be manifest, is a reflection of Brahman. In a way this concept has similarities with the discoveries of modern science. Previously, in the classical Cartesian-Newtonian period, there was an incurable dichotomy between matter and energy. But after Einstein there is the understanding that whatever exists is really a manifestation of the same energy, although it may appear as matter—as a particle or as a wave. Therefore, the unified field towards which the scientists are proceeding has its spiritual counterpart in the concept of the all-pervading Brahman of the Upanishads. This is the first important concept of the Vedantic knowledge.

The second is that Brahman, superimposed by the ignorance of an individual appears as the Atman. The Atman is, so to say, the reflection of this all-pervading Brahman in the individual consciousness. The Atman is not separate from Brahman, it is identical to Brahman. One of the examples given in the Upanishads is that when a great fire is lighted, millions of sparks fly up out of the fire and then fall back into it; equally, from Brahman arise all these millions of individual selves and into Brahman again they all ultimately merge.² '*Sarvabhutanam bhriddeshē'rjuna tishthati*; O Arjuna, God resides in the region of the heart of all creatures.'³ This second great insight of the Upanishads, the relationship between the Atman and Brahman, is the keynote upon which the entire Vedantic teachings revolve.

The third point of relevance comes from yoga, which is widely known around the world but its deeper significance is seldom realized. The word 'yoga' comes from the same Sanskrit root as does the English word 'yoke', and implies joining the indwelling Atman with the all-pervading Brahman. In the Hindu tradition there are four main paths of yoga.

(i) Jnana yoga, the yoga of wisdom, involving intellectual discernment between the real and the unreal, which leads to spiritual illumination. In the Western tradition this could perhaps be likened to Plato's philosophy, the contemplation upon the eternal truths that lie behind their material manifestation.

(ii) Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, is an outpouring of love and devotion to a personalized manifestation of the divine. While jnana yoga does not need to focus upon any divine form, bhakti yoga prescribes a divine form upon which one's devotion is to be focused. The Hindu pantheon has a rich spectrum of divine manifestations, predominant among whom are Shiva, Vishnu—including his two incarnations as Rama and Krishna—and the various goddesses in many different forms. In the Buddhist traditions there is adoration of Buddha or the bodhisattvas. In the Western tradition there is the adoration of Jesus Christ. Even in Islam there is a strong devotional dimension among the Sufis, such as the mystic Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi.

(iii) Karma yoga, the yoga of work, is the dedication of actions and their fruits to the divine by removing the idea of 'self'. Karma yoga includes all works in the field of health, education, environment, philanthropy, and so forth. According to the Hindu belief, if all such actions are performed with a spirit of inner devotion and dedication to the Divine, they can become a powerful means of spiritual liberation. This is stressed particularly in the Bhagavadgita.

(iv) Raja yoga, the yoga of concentration, includes many psycho-spiritual disciplines like *pranayama*, control of the *prana*, vital breath, and various asanas, postures. According to the Hindu tradition, especially the yoga-tantra tradition, the human body contains hidden forces and spiritual powers known as the kundalini, believed to lie coiled at the base of the spine. This yoga teaches meditation with the purpose of releasing the kundalini, which when awakened moves up from the base through the spine, energizing various chakras on the way, until it finally explodes into the thousand petalled lotus located in the brain and brings about a transmutation of consciousness. It is important to stress that all the paths of yoga are directed towards bringing about a union between the inner Divinity and the supreme Divine while living, not at some stage or place after death.

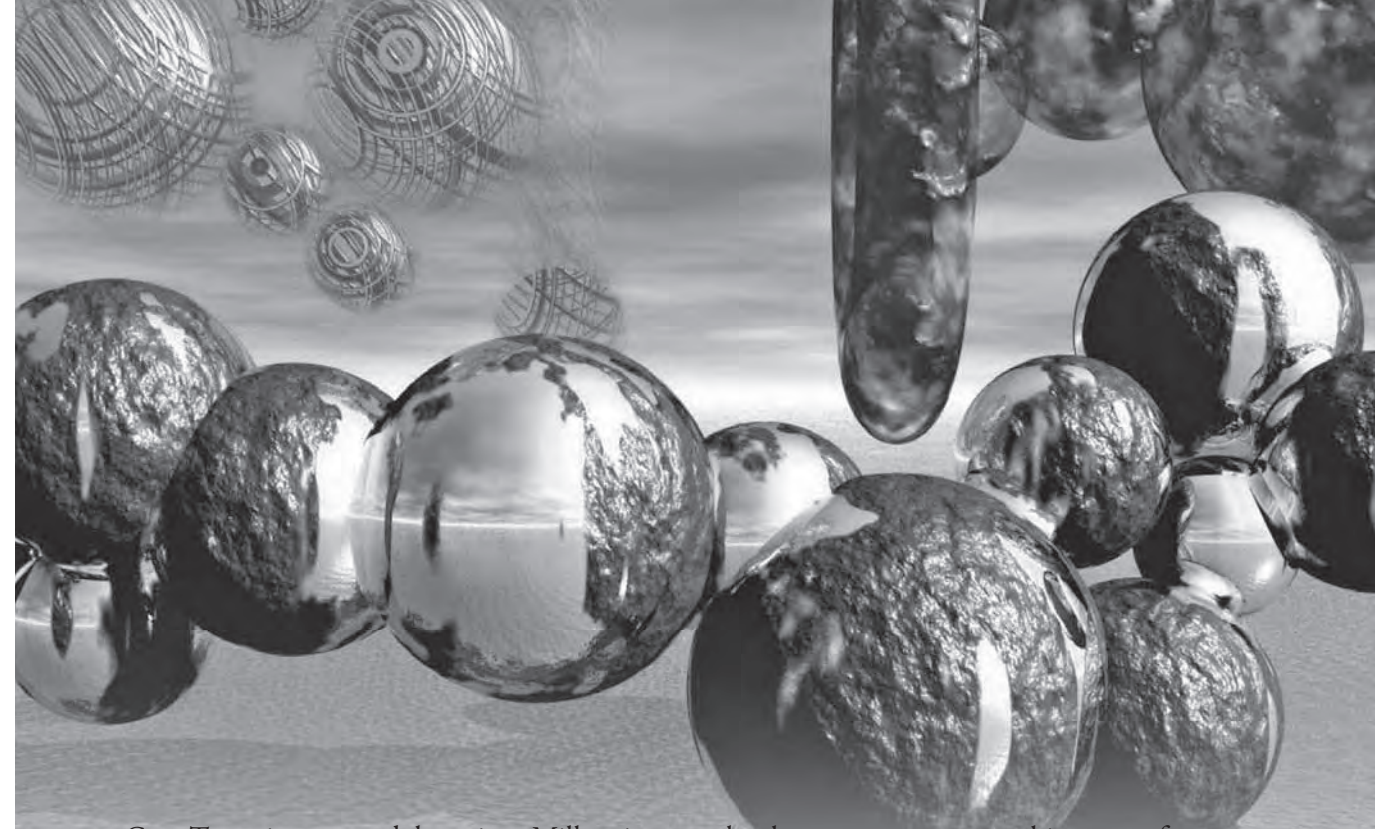
The fourth relevant principle of Vedanta is that all human beings, because of their shared spirituality, are members of a single extended family. The Upanishads have a beautiful expression for all living beings, and even the gods: *amritasya putrah*, children of immortality.⁴ We carry within us the light and the power of Brahman, regardless of our race, colour, creed, sex, or any other difference. That is the basis of the concept of human beings as an extended family: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. Notions of 'mine' and 'yours' are narrow views of reality. For those of the greater consciousness, the entire world is a family.⁵ This is another great insight of the Upanishads, particularly relevant at this juncture in human history when technology is making possible the coming of a global society. Indeed if this global society is to choose a motto it can only be: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.

We come now to the fifth major Vedantic concept, the essential unity of all religions, of all spiritual paths, as the Rig Veda declares: '*Ekam*

sad vipra babudha vadanti; truth is one, the sages call it by many names.'⁶ The *Mundaka Upanishad* has a beautiful verse mentioning streams and rivulets that arise in different parts of the world but ultimately flow into the same ocean.⁷ Similarly all these creeds and religious formulations arise in different times and places, ultimately reaching the same goal. Here is a philosophy that cuts across the barriers of hatred and fanaticism that have been built in the name of religion.

Vedanta is a universal religion; it accepts the infinite possibilities of going towards the Divine and does not seek to limit or confine us to any particular formulation. Vedanta not only accepts but welcomes a multiplicity of paths to the Divine. It is like climbing a mountain that has several starting points; in the beginning we may remain miles apart, but as we start to climb and move upwards our paths begin to converge, and ultimately when we reach the top we all meet there, because there is only one summit. Similarly, once we really start moving upwards in the field of spiritual endeavour, we find our denominational and intellectual differences gradually losing their importance, and as we rise to the summit we realize the spiritual oneness of humanity.

I would like here to make a special reference to the interfaith movement, which can be said to have begun with the World's Parliament of Religions held in 1893. It was Swami Vivekananda who in his inaugural and other addresses at this parliament instilled the idea of religious plurality, which is a byword today. In the twentieth century a large number of interfaith organizations have come into being, including the Temple of Understanding, of which I happen to be the Chairperson. There were also a number of significant interfaith gatherings around the world, including the Second World Conference in Chicago, in 1993, the third conference in



Cape Town, in 1999, and the unique Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which was held under the auspices of the United Nations in 2000. The entire movement is directed towards bringing harmony and understanding between the many religions of the world. The unfortunate history of inter-religious conflict must ultimately give way to an atmosphere of harmony; otherwise, if religious conflicts continue to rage in this era of high technology, only disaster will result. Hinduism is particularly open to this movement because of its acceptance of multiple paths to the Divine.

The sixth Vedantic concept is that of the welfare of all beings: '*Bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya*; for the welfare of all, for the happiness of all.'⁸ Vedanta seeks the welfare of all creation, not only of human beings but also of the lower creatures. In our arrogance and ignorance we are destroying the environment that sustains us. We have polluted the oceans and made the air unbreathable, we have desecrated nature and decimated wildlife. The Vedantic seers knew

that humans are not something apart from nature and, therefore, they had compassion for all living beings. The famous 'Bhumi Suktam', Hymn to the Earth, in the Atharva Veda presents in its sixty-three verses probably the most comprehensive formulation of environmental values.⁹ War, of course, is the worst pollutant, and the only way to protect our environment is to strengthen the foundations of peace in the hearts of human beings.

Vedanta constantly exhorts us to work for our own salvation and shun the path of violence and hatred. We must strive for the welfare of society and for the uplift of the materially needy and the spiritually poor. We must seek to develop both elements of our psyche: the inner and the outer, the quietist and the activist. Indeed, these are two sides of the same coin, so that while working out our own destiny we have also to work for the welfare of all beings. Vedanta is not, as some believe, a selfish creed; rather, it places human consciousness in the broader context of evolution.



Global Civilization

These six concepts of the Vedanta—the all-pervasive Brahman, the Atman that resides in all beings, the four paths of yoga, the concept of the human race as members of an extended family, the idea that all religions are essentially different paths to the same goal, and the concept that we must work for the welfare of society as a whole and not only for ourselves—when taken together provide us with a comprehensive world view. This Vedantic world view will greatly help in the process of globalization upon which we have embarked. Each one of these concepts can be elaborated at length, but in this presentation I have simply given an outline of some of the main principles of Vedanta, which have universal validity.

We can survive and flourish as a global civilization only if we have an ideology alternative to the one that has led humankind to its present dilemma, and if we boldly act in harmony with

this new ideology. Even at this late hour we can imbibe some of Vedanta's universal truths, contributing thus to reverse the mad rush towards destruction. The time has come to begin with the long, slow climb back to sanity. Let me close, then, with an immortal Vedic prayer: '*Asato ma sad gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya*': lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.'¹⁰



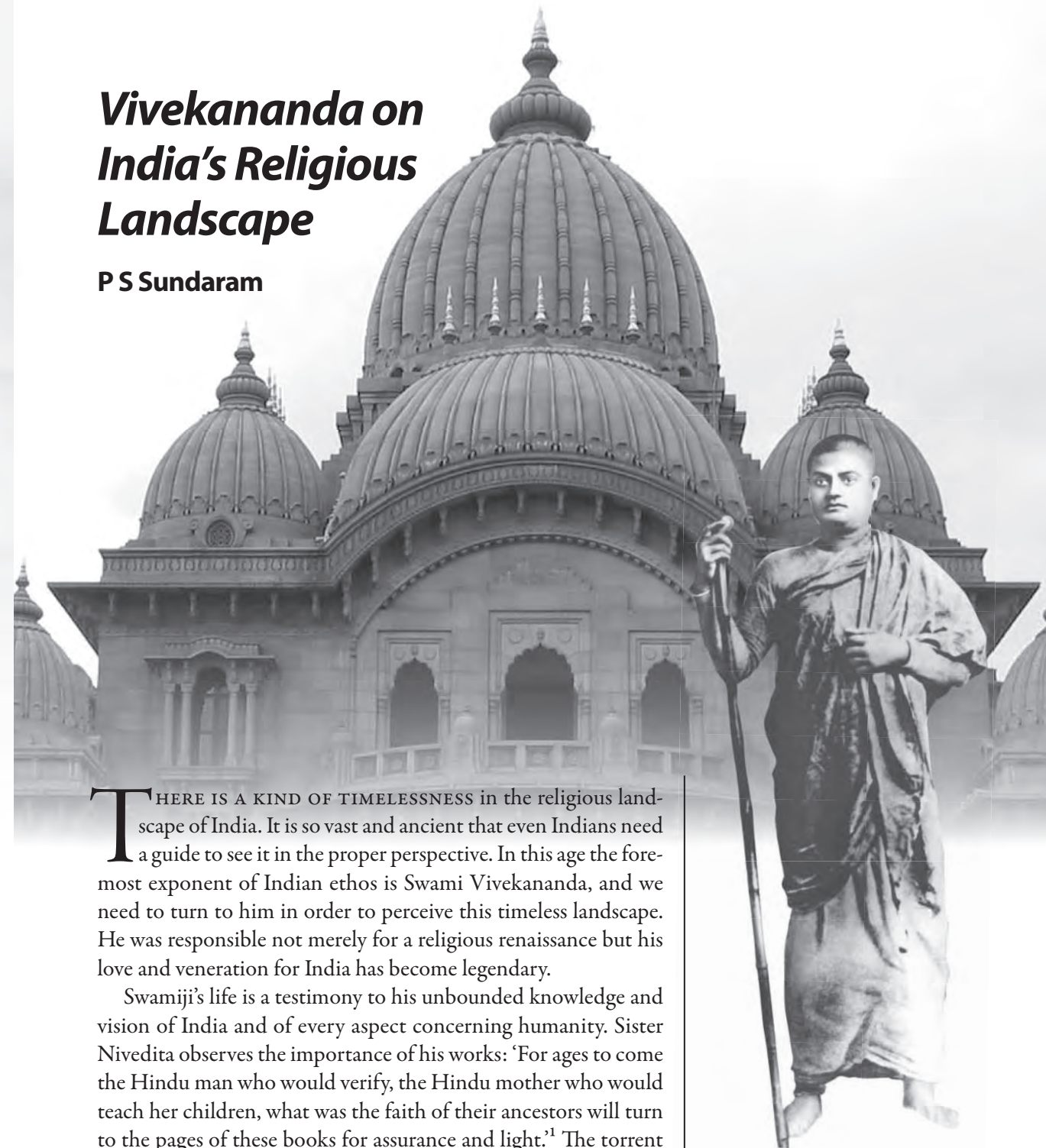
References

1. *Isha Upanishad*, 1.
2. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20.
3. *Bhagavadgita*, 18.61.
4. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 2.5.
5. See *Maha Upanishad*, 6.72; *Hitopadesha*, 1.3.71; and *Panchatantra*, 5.3.37.
6. *Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.
7. See *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.7.
8. *Vinaya Mahavagga*, 1.7-20.
9. *Atharva Veda*, 12.1.1-63.
10. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28.

DRAWING: 'LIFE ON EARTH', BY SHREEYA SHARMA

Vivekananda on India's Religious Landscape

P S Sundaram



THERE IS A KIND OF TIMELESSNESS in the religious landscape of India. It is so vast and ancient that even Indians need a guide to see it in the proper perspective. In this age the foremost exponent of Indian ethos is Swami Vivekananda, and we need to turn to him in order to perceive this timeless landscape. He was responsible not merely for a religious renaissance but his love and veneration for India has become legendary.

Swamiji's life is a testimony to his unbounded knowledge and vision of India and of every aspect concerning humanity. Sister Nivedita observes the importance of his works: 'For ages to come the Hindu man who would verify, the Hindu mother who would teach her children, what was the faith of their ancestors will turn to the pages of these books for assurance and light.'¹ The torrent of ideas that Swamiji had of religion in modern India are stupendous. His words are manifestations of divine light.

P S Sundaram is a long-time devotee from Chennai.

Purpose of Religion

The goal of religion is moksha, liberation. This is the ideal placed before everyone. Religion should make humans godlike, with qualities such as selflessness, renunciation, tolerance, honesty, contentment, and love for all. Each individual soul, because of its inherent divinity, has undertaken a long journey back to its real nature. Swamiji succinctly says: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or by psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion' (1.257). The ancient sages understood that

the jiva's journey back to God has various levels and avenues; therefore, each jiva must be offered help on the way. This is the reason for the vast proliferation of beliefs, rituals, practices, as well as gods and goddesses. As the jiva journeys and matures, it ascends to higher and higher levels. Swamiji says: 'From the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite' (1.17). Though methods of seeking God differ, the goal is one. Unlike some monotheistic religions with a central authority and dogma, religion in India did not have any central authority. Authority and freedom in religion was invested to all, whether theist, atheist, or agnostic, as long

as one did not disturb or injure others. Each one could choose according to one's nature and inclination.

One of the most powerful civilizing factors in human history has been religion. It has made humankind think of itself not as matter but as spirit. It is spirituality that has helped people to overcome many struggles and obstacles that matter inevitably creates in the path of progress. The more people thought themselves as divine, the more they progressed; the more people thought of themselves as matter, the more that progress was arrested. Religion has helped build social relationships and institutions, formed social bonds, inculcated reverence for life and nature, and has inspired people to become perfect.



Krishna Splits the Double Arjuna Tree, Gujarat, c.1720



Sadhus of Eastern Bengal in 1860s

Religion is a tangible science, and until one realizes the truths of religion, one is not truly religious. The person in whom religion dawns is called a rishi. These religious truths are supersensuous. Many a time we mistake mundane truths, however subtle, for religious ones and fight over them. Mundane truths are by nature contradictory, and that is why there is so much fight and dispute in the name of religion. The attainment of rishi-hood is the true realization of religion, and the truths of religion are called Veda. Veda, in its actual meaning, is not contradictory, because it is infinite. The purpose of religion is to convert the

ordinary mind into that of a rishi to actualize the supersensuous truths.

One of the onerous tasks given to Swamiji by Sri Ramakrishna was the reformulation of the Sanatana Dharma. For millennia the scriptures called the Vedas were the main authority in the religious life of India, because they set forth the steps to a universal life. Some aspects of a universal life are also found in the Puranas and Itihasas. All this literature has two aspects: knowledge and work. The latter kept changing according to the changing times; the former was beyond time and change and was immutable. As time

rolled on, people lost sight of the original scriptures and their meaning and deviated from the source. Failing to understand even the message of the Puranas they became attached to popular customs and beliefs and created new sects from old materials.

While branching off into various sects and practices, these sects and various religions retained some part of the original truths. It was Sri Ramakrishna who by his advent showed what Sanatana Dharma is and where the unity among all the numberless sects and denominations lay. And this great work he did by going through various sects, denominations, and religions, authenticating them through his realizations. Then fusing all these different truths he embodied them as a unified whole and held his life as an ideal and an object lesson before

India.² Swamiji saw the glorious and significant life of his Master and preached it to the world. That is why he composed the salutation to his Master thus: '*Sthapakaya cha dharmasya sarva-dharma-svarupine, avatara-varishthaya ramakrishnaya te namah*'; Salutations to Thee, O Ramakrishna, the Reinstator of Religions, the Embodiment of all Religions, the Greatest of all Incarnations.'³

Swamiji's Vision of India and the World

During his years as a wandering monk, Swamiji had seen India at close quarters, from the high to the low. He understood that India had weathered many storms because she held on to religion. On his return from the West, Swamiji spoke at Ramnad: 'And here in this blessed land, the foundation, the backbone, the life-centre is

Three Hindu priests writing religious texts in Jammu and Kashmir, 1895



'The Barge of the Maharaja of Benares,' by Edwin Lord Weeks, c.1883

religion and religion alone.'⁴ Around religion had grown all the languages, cultures, arts, sciences, learning, and life itself. And because religion was decaying, so was the national life and national vigour. Swamiji saw that religion was not at fault for this degraded state of affairs, but it was due to the non-application or wrong application of religious principles. People had to be brought back to the mainstream not by denunciations but by encouragement. And this he set forth to accomplish. If religion was strong, so would be the people. Swamiji saw a slow revival of religion and declared this in a stirring lecture at Ramnad, which is a masterpiece of eloquence, passion, pain, joy, strength, and deep insight:

The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at

last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking and a voice is coming to us—away back where history and even tradition fails to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected as it were from peak to peak of the infinite Himalaya of knowledge, and of love, and of work, India, this motherland of ours—a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet (3.145–6).



Hindu Temple in Lilbun, Georgia, USA

The religious revival in India was not just going to benefit India, but there was a greater global role and purpose. Politically, India was a conquered nation, an old 'jewel in the [British] crown'. She had been systematically exploited over centuries and now there was nothing else that she had but religion. She would revive herself through that and in the process she would also revive the world. Responding to the welcome accorded in Madurai, Swamiji reminded us:

We find that whenever either by mighty conquest or by commercial supremacy different parts of the world have been kneaded into one whole race and bequests have been made from one corner to the other, each nation, as it were, poured forth its own quota, either political, social, or spiritual. India's contribution to the sum total of human knowledge has been spirituality, philosophy. These she contributed even long before the rising of the Persian Empire; the second time was during the Persian Empire; for the

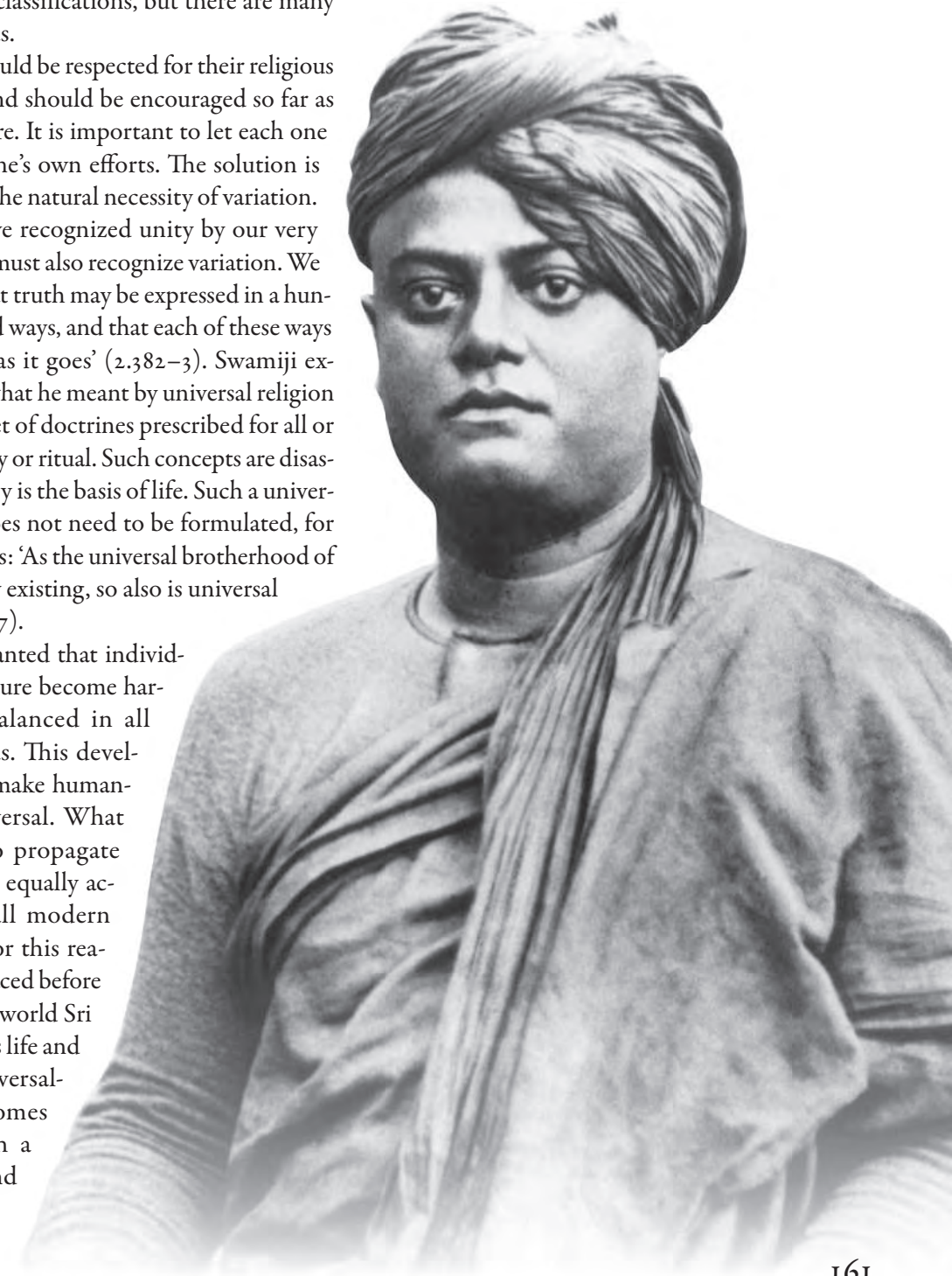
third time during the ascendancy of the Greeks; and now for the fourth time during the ascendancy of the English, she is going to fulfil the same destiny once more. As Western ideas of organization and external civilisation are penetrating and pouring into our country, whether we will have them or not, so Indian spirituality and philosophy are deluging the lands of the West (3.171).

At a deep level humanity is essentially one. All the variations are on the surface or just slightly below the surface. If 'religion is a constitutional necessity of the human mind' (1.318), then it also means that real religion, like humanity, is one. Swamiji says: 'One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can' (4.180). The one religion manifests differently not only geographically and culturally

but also within individuals. One person manifests religion as karma, a second as bhakti, a third as yoga, and a fourth as jnana. These are of course broad classifications, but there are many other sadhanas.

People should be respected for their religious convictions and should be encouraged so far as they are sincere. It is important to let each one progress by one's own efforts. The solution is to recognize 'the natural necessity of variation. Just as we have recognized unity by our very nature, so we must also recognize variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes' (2.382-3). Swamiji explained that what he meant by universal religion was not one set of doctrines prescribed for all or one mythology or ritual. Such concepts are disastrous, as variety is the basis of life. Such a universal religion does not need to be formulated, for it already exists: 'As the universal brotherhood of man is already existing, so also is universal religion' (2.367).

Swamiji wanted that individuals in the future become harmoniously balanced in all the four yogas. This development will make humanity truly universal. What he wanted to propagate was a religion equally acceptable to all modern minds. It is for this reason that he placed before India and the world Sri Ramakrishna's life and message. Universality now becomes tangible with a holy name and form.






Sri Ramakrishna and Harmony

Religion concerns itself with the metaphysical, while the physical world is the domain of science. It is becoming more and more accepted that there should be mutuality between science and religion. Just like Sri Ramakrishna showed that all religions and sects lead to the same goal, so also all the various branches of knowledge lead one from the physical to the metaphysical. The word 'harmony' carries a great significance for future humanity.

The purpose of human birth is to realize God, and true religion is realization. Swamiji said:

A harmony of all these [yogas] is the thing required. Ramakrishna was such a harmony. Such beings are few and far between; but keeping him and his teachings as the ideal, we can move on. And if amongst us, each one may not individually attain to that perfection,

still we may get it collectively by counteracting, equipoising, adjusting, and fulfilling one another. This would be harmony by a number of persons and a decided advance on all other forms and creeds (4.356).

The timeless religious landscape of India has embodied as Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda for India and the world. 

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), I.ix.
2. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 453.
3. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 2.307.
4. *Complete Works*, 3.148.

PAINTING: 'THAKUR AND NAREN', BY D SIVA PRASAD / COURTESY RAMAKRISHNA MATH, HYDERABAD

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA, publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Philosophy of Peace

Ed. Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra

Readworthy Publications, B-65, Mansa Ram Park, Near Nawada Metro Station, New Delhi 110 059. Website: www.readworthypub.com. 2011. 124 pp. ₹ 495.

Humankind in the twenty-first century has everything but peace. Technology has enlarged and enriched our material life and has also intensified the turmoil in our minds. Humans have learnt to travel in outer space, though life in peace on earth is a terrible problem. The book under review, which is a compilation of articles of *Vedanta Kesari* from 1986 to 2007, published from Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, seeks to address this problem.

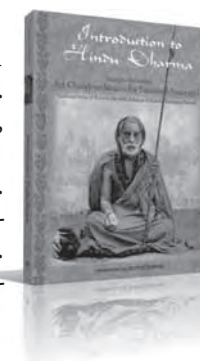
Twelve thought-provoking and scholarly articles from renowned and erudite authors have been included in this book. The authors are Swamis Sridharananda, Ananyananda, Bhavyananda, Prabuddhananda, Mridananda, Tripurananda, and Jitatmananda, Dr Karan Singh, Dr Sampooran Singh, A R Mohapatra, R R Divakar, and Justice A N Ray. The subject of peace is dealt with by them from different perspectives: individual, family, social, national, and international spheres. All of them voice the same opinion, that peace can be attained only if we turn our gaze inwards and develop faith in the ultimate guiding principle of the universe.

The gist of the ideas presented is as follows: A mind at peace is in an intense state of awareness. This awareness is beyond the state of knowledge, memory, or experience. The actions resulting from such a state of awareness will impart peace. The key to world peace is an awareness to be perceived at all moments, that all life is indivisible. World peace implies a holistic vision for the solutions of social, economic, environmental, and

political problems. At the individual level cultivation of dispassion and discernment helps in maintaining peace of mind. Identification with the body-mind complex and the ego causes turmoil in the mind. By freeing oneself from the egoistic feeling of 'I and mine' one attains peace. Vedanta teaches that each of us has an unchanging core. Somehow one has to turn within to this core, which is free from all turmoil, and become established in it. There must be constant, conscious, and deliberate efforts to detach ourselves from the 'winds and tempests' and remain in our own centre. An ethical and moral life coupled with sadhanas like prayer, meditation, worship, kirtan, japa, and seva helps in this inward journey. This returning to the zone of calmness is the secret of peace and well-being. Unflinching faith in God is one of the best means for attaining peace. Philosophy and law should join hands to establish international laws, which would bring about a peaceful coexistence of all nations, politically, economically, and socially.

The book offers not only different perspectives of the philosophy of peace but it serves as a guide to show the methods towards realizing peace. It makes for informative and inspiring reading. The price is quite high but the production is excellent.

Dr Chetana Mandavia
Professor of Plant Physiology,
Junagadh Agricultural University



Introduction to Hindu Dharma

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamikal; ed. Michael Oren Fitzgerald

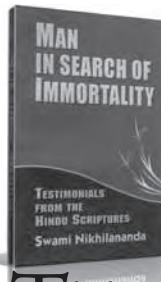
Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Website: www.mldb.com. 2010. xxi + 145 pp. ₹ 695.

‘When were we separate? We are always together.’ When the great saint Ramana Maharshi says this about Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamikal, one gets an idea of the latter’s greatness. One of the great Hindu religious leaders of the last century, the swami’s pure life and depth of scholarship was his greatest message to humankind. The 68th pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham, Kanchipuram, the swami lived a century dedicated to the preservation and propagation of Hindu ideals and practices. The present book is a painstaking labour of love displaying a selection of the swami’s discourses in Tamil, which have been translated into English, edited, and topically arranged. The editor deserves special commendation for this marvellous work which has been culled from a transcript of more than 6,500 pages.

The basic precepts and practices of Hinduism are outlined in the book. Beginning with the concept of religion in general, the swami takes us through the principles of the Vedas. He explains the system of *varnashrama*, caste, and its place in modern society. He also explains the basics of *nyaya*, logic, and elaborates on the importance of the Puranas. Rituals form an integral part of Hinduism, but many modern Hindus are sceptical about their relevance. The swami explains the rationale behind these rituals and classifies them according to the different ashramas, stages of life. Karma as a means to attain peaceful meditation is insightfully described. The swami beautifully relates common ideas of goodness to the concept of dharma. Besides, he dilates on the role of the state in upholding religion. Many miscellaneous utterances of the swami have been given at the end of the book, enhancing the presentation. Elaborate notes, a glossary, and an index make for a comfortable reading.

An Indian edition of the original American book, this volume has an elegant layout design. It is also a pictorial biography, as different phases of the swami’s life have been captured in high quality photographs. There is a scholarly introduction by Arvind Sharma of McGill University. This book is a treasure for students of Hinduism and admirers of the swami.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



**Man in Search of Immortality:
Testimonials from
the Hindu Scriptures**
Swami Nikhilananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Website: www.chennaiamath.org. 2009. viii + 152 pp. ₹ 35.

The human quest, in order to conquer death, has led to the development of religion, philosophy, humanities, and also science. Death humbles humanity and mocks at all its illusions of power. Everything crumbles before this inevitability. This quest taken up by great sages and saints finally led to the discovery of the true human nature as being beyond the body and the mind. The renowned author traces the concept of immortality in various religions and gives numerous testimonials from the Hindu scriptures. In five articles Swami Nikhilananda shows the eternal nature of the soul, its three states, and the real nature of Being.

Lucidly written, the book brings modern motifs to elucidate traditional beliefs. An appendix of quotations from the Bhagavadgita and Upanishads and an index adds to its value. The book helps one assert that death is but a phase in the jiva’s path and that one becomes immortal by ultimately knowing the Atman. An Indian imprint of the original American edition, this slim volume is helpful to all spiritual seekers and students of Indian philosophy.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



**Alasinga Perumal:
An Illustrious Disciple
of Swami Vivekananda**
Swami Sunirmalananda

Ramakrishna Math. 2012. 342 pp. ₹ 75.

There are many types of perfections, but Swami Vivekananda is a rare form of an all-round perfection. Swamiji is also a prototype of a perfect human. A self-effacing and dedicated servitor who identifies with such a spiritual colossus is also rare. This was Alasinga Perumal, the brightest star among the super disciples and devotees of

Swamiji. He worked out his spiritual life by total self-surrender and true service to his guru. The book is an excellent biography of a noble soul who made history by single-minded service to Swamiji and his cause. People will learn from him what dedication means.

The epic story of Alasinga Perumal, narrated by the learned author with passion, grace, and sensitivity, is veritably the *sundara kanda*, beautiful chapter, of *Vivekanandayana*, the story of Vivekananda. The author refers to Alasinga Perumal as the ‘Hanuman of Vivekananda’—as Hanuman performed incredible feats of heroism and faced fearsome trials and tribulations to achieve his mission, similarly Alasinga Perumal underwent severe hardships and made herculean efforts to help his guru. As Rama often praised Hanuman, so did Swamiji praise Alasinga.

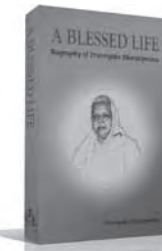
This hitherto untold touching story in English of Alasinga chronicles many absorbing episodes of his life. What an unending string of ordeals and obstacles Alasinga had to encounter! As the foremost and trusted of Swamiji’s devotees, Alasinga grappled with many hurdles, threatening to thwart Swamiji’s glorious mission, with remarkable fortitude and unruffled equipoise. He was so tenaciously wedded to the sacred cause of Swamiji that he neither cared for the daily grind of his personal life nor the stark reality of his economic hardships. His gaze was steadily riveted on sending the then unknown Swamiji as a representative of Hinduism to the World’s Parliament of Religions of 1893. Such was his faith in Swamiji that Alasinga toiled day and night, begged and borrowed money from all conceivable sources, and infected his friends and well-wishers with his own crusading zeal and unshakable resolve. It is this commitment, dedication, and determination of a nondescript Madras teacher for the worldwide propagation of Sanatana Dharma that makes the book so engaging. Hanuman trounced the demons in Lanka by his sheer physical and mental prowess. Alasinga confronted those who criticized Swamiji and his mission to rouse the nation by organizing public meetings in Madras, travelling, and also writing through the columns of the *Brahmavadin*, which he started at his guru’s instance.

The volume contains interesting anecdotes regarding Alasinga’s interaction with his formidable guru. He had the unique fortune of being often endearingly addressed by Swamiji as ‘my boy’ and ‘my dear boy’. While Alasinga basked in the light of his towering guru’s love and affection, many a time had he to face Swamiji’s verbal darts. But Alasinga neither exulted in the compliments nor wilted under his occasional harsh words. The constancy of his devotion and loyalty to his guru was simply amazing.

The book is a treasure-trove of significant correspondence between Alasinga and Swamiji. This correspondence is a true barometer of the extent of trust and goodwill enjoyed by both. The book also contains letters of Lokmanya B G Tilak to Alasinga, including the rich tribute in Tamil paid by the noted patriot-poet Subramanya Bharathi to Alasinga Perumal. Fifty-three valuable illustrations enhance the charm and narrative of the story.

Highly readable, written in a simple and appealing style, this lofty life of Alasinga has the superb touch of the author’s genuine earnestness. The production of the book is also nice, making it a treasure for true enlightenment, edification, and inspiration.

N Hariharan
Madurai



A Blessed Life
Pravrajika Jnanadrapana

Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Kolkata 700 076. Website: www.srisaradamath.org. 2012. 332 pp. ₹ 100.

The establishing of Sri Sarada Math was a historic event, unprecedented in the annals of Indian history. There are many instances where women took Vedic sannyasa, but women autonomously building a monastic community and conferring sannyasa to other women was new. Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, had a clear vision that in future dedicated women would come forward to take up the life with the motto coined by Swami Vivekananda: ‘*Atmano mokshartham jagadhitaya cha*; for one’s own liberation and the good of the world.’ These women would live as a community with a lofty ideal to inspire them.

An independent women's monastic organization for all-renouncing young women had also been a fond dream of Swami Vivekananda. It was his prophecy that even if one woman becomes a *brahmaid*, knower of Brahman, she will inspire thousands.

A saint's life is the greatest inspiration for all sadhakas, as it draws us unconsciously to the spiritual goal. *A Blessed Life* is a detailed biography of Pravrajika Bharatiprana, the first president of Sri Sarada Math. Born Parul Mukherjee in 1894, she in time would work to fulfil the mission of the Holy Mother. As a child Sarala Devi, as Parul came to be called later, saw Swami Vivekananda, which created a great impact on her. Sister Nivedita and Sudhira Devi were other sources of constant inspiration for her. The Holy Mother took Sarala Devi under her care and initiated her on Buddha Purnima in 1911. She left home at sixteen and lived incognito for more than two years.

Sarala Devi completed her nursing training course in 1917, which was revolutionary for a girl in those days. She mostly lived with the Holy Mother at the Udbodhan as her attendant, serving her with all devotion. After the Holy Mother's *mahasamadhi* Sarala Devi came under the protection of Swami Saradananda, who initiated her into *kaula* sannyasa, tantric sannyasa, and named her Sri Bharati. After Swami Saradananda passed away, for the next twenty-seven years, Sarala Devi did intense tapasya in Varanasi.

During the auspicious centenary celebrations of Sri Sarada Devi in 1954 the authorities of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, founded Sri Sarada Math and made Sarala Devi the first president. She received Vedic sannyasa from Swami Sankarananda, the seventh president of Ramakrishna Math. She was then named Pravrajika Bharatiprana.

Revered Bharatiprana Mataji's life was resplendent with austerities and spiritual experiences. She became a luminous centre of service, sacrifice, holiness, and a narrative of the successful unfoldment of a women's spiritual movement through an organization totally independent of male administration. She set a glowing example of a dedicated, single-minded, and devoted life before the young monastic members of Sri Sarada Math.

People seeking to lead a spiritual life will find a wealth of inspirational information in this biography, which is steeped in sadhana and complete renunciation. The material for this wonderful book has been carefully collected from various sources. The chapter 'In Fond Remembrance' contains reminiscences of senior sannyasinis of the Order. Selected letters written to Bharatiprana Mataji and some of her speeches have also been included in the book.

Anuradha Girish
Bengaluru



She the Incredible
Ed. P K Ravindranath

Shailaja Nair Foundation, A-103, Mangalya, Marol Maroshi Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai 400 059. Website: www.shailajanair.com. 2011. 232 pp. ₹450.

When I found the book on my table, I was innocent enough to recapitulate my teenage romance with Rider Haggard's *She*. I could read it umpteen times and go in and out of the catacombs watching Ayesha, the incredibly powerful Arab queen. I heaved a sigh of relief when I opened the book and my eyes fell on Pratap Nair's words: 'To all our women readers, my earnest message is just be proud of being a woman; and to all men, value the women in your life' (5). I knew then that here was no imagined twaddle but a proud rediscovery of Indian womanhood for the readers.

When Swami Vivekananda participated in the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, one of the most inspiring sights for him was that of American womanhood. These women were educated, self-confident, and ready to help others. Even men treated them with respect. He knew Indian women had been in the forefront in the past, but in his time women had become replaceable appendages. He dreamt of a day when Indian women would get back to their original stature. In *She the Incredible* we have a book of inspirations for both women and men alike.

The volume starts with the brave Rani Lakshmi Bai, and the earlier heroine Rani Chennamma of Kittur is remembered as well. Quite a few queens have raised the stature of India's heroic

genius, and the *parampara*, tradition, is not limited to Hindu Rajput queens but also Muslims like Razia Sultana. Two young women, Priya Patrachari and Anjani Nautiyal, have faced the unenviable job of selecting from the rich material available on the lives of many great women who made an impact on Indian history. The women come from many facets of life: social workers—Savitribai Phule, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur; politicians—Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali; singers—M S Subbulakshmi, Gangubai Hangal; foreign friends of India—Mirra Alfassa, Annie Besant; writers, corporate executives, sportswomen, and others. This representation is plentiful in every way, despite the tilting towards a tinsel world of glamour. Occasionally warts also get mentioned, like Pratibha Patil's questionable financial dealings.

The book offers a very good introduction to woman-power in India and brings to light at least half a dozen names not known much outside their immediate circle. Anna Mani, the eminent physicist who preferred a set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to diamond earrings as a birthday gift, ultimately worked on the spectroscopy of diamonds and rubies; Lieutenant General Punita Arora of Army's Medical Corps was a great motivator; Godavari Parulekar was like a mother to the downtrodden *adivasis*, tribals, of Maharashtra—heroines all.

India is a land where every aspect of life tends towards the spiritual, and women have guarded this *agni*, fire, with patience and care. The heart rises in adoration to read about Sri Sarada Devi, Indu Jain, and Mata Amritanandamayi. Of course we have only a hundred names in the book. We do miss a thousand more, especially Sister Nivedita and Durgabai Deshmukh. Hopefully the Shailaja Nair Foundation's work in highlighting Indian woman is not going to stop with this volume.

She the Incredible is also a well-produced gift for our teenage girls on the threshold of life. Be a barrier-breaker and achiever like any one of these ladies and prove that a woman is no expendable garbage!

Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic,
Srirangam



Ancient Indian Influence on Japanese Culture
Yoshihiro Kaburagi

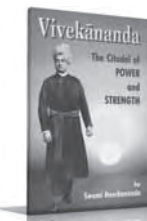
Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmbooks.com. 2012. xviii + 354 pp. ₹1195.

Every nation assimilates culture from others in order to enrich its indigenous values. Japan's interest with India was initially limited to Buddhism, Sanskrit, and philosophy, which had made inroads into Japan from the early periods of Buddhism's influence into the far East. Later other areas of interaction slowly grew as a matter of course, like trade, politics, economics, society, urban planning, religion, architecture, sculpture, monuments, paintings, pottery, metalware, glassware, traditions, social customs, pilgrimage, and social classification, which are outlined in this book.

Born out of the PhD research by the author under the Indo-Japan Cultural Exchange Programme and endowed with an exhaustive bibliography and index, this volume is a testimony to the ties at different levels between India and Japan.

PB

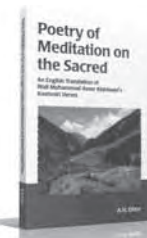
BOOKS RECEIVED



Vivekananda: The Citadel of Power and Strength
Swami Harshananda

Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bengaluru 560 019. Website: www.rk-mathbangalore.org. 2012. 48 pp. ₹5.

This subsidized book briefly introduces Swamiji's life and philosophy to India's youth.



Poetry of Meditation on the Sacred
A N Dhar

Peacock Books, 7/22 Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi 110 002. Website: www.atlanticbooks.com. 2012. viii + 87. ₹150.

This sensitive English translation of Wali Muhammad Aseer Kishtwari's verses captures the essence of Kashmiri poetry.

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes in commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Baranagore Mission:** A parents' conference at Harit, Hooghly, on 11 November 2012, in which 104 parents participated. **Chengalpattu:** Processions, devotional music, and film shows on Swamiji at Pazhavanur, Periya Venmani, Pudur, Vazhaipattu, Arundhadhipalayam, Ecchankaranai, Silavattam, L N Puram, Samandhipuram, and Onampakkam 20, 21, 27, and 28 October and 3, 4, 9, 10, 16, and 17 November respectively. **Delhi:** A two-day workshop, as the final stage of GenNext Leader Discovery Contest, on 3 and 4 November, in which 30 students took part. Shanmukha Concert, a fusion of rhythm and melody by six musicians on different instruments, on 25 November, attended by nearly 400 people. **Hyderabad:** Spiritual retreat for 150 sweepers, garbage cleaners, and drivers working under Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation on 18 November; at the end of the retreat, each participant was presented with fruits, a woolen blanket, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda books, and one year subscription to the monthly Telugu journal *Sri Ramakrishna Prabha*. **Jessore** (Bangladesh): A programme, inaugurated by Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 27 November. Discourses, procession, and musical performances formed part of the event,



Spiritual retreat for sweepers, garbage cleaners, and drivers working in Hyderabad

attended by about 6,000 people. **Lucknow:** A seminar on 'Role of Yoga towards Personal Development' on 3 November, attended by about 150 people. **Mangalore:** A cultural festival on 6 and 7 October, attended by about 1,800 people; the programme included Yakshagana and Hindustani classical vocal and instrumental music. Seven district-level youth conventions, one each in the following districts of Karnataka: Haveri, Dharwad, Hassan, Bidar, Gulbarga, Tumkur, and Chitradurga on 9 and 10 October and 17, 26, 27, 29, and 30 November respectively. In all about 5,000 youths attended the conventions. **Narainpur:** A public meeting on 7 November addressed by Sri Pranab Mukherjee, president of India, Sri Shekhar Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, Dr Raman Singh, chief minister of Chhattisgarh, and a few other dignitaries. Nearly 5,000 people attended the meeting. **Ramharipur:** A public meeting and a music concert at Durgapur on 25 November, attended by about 1,300

people. **Salem:** Discourses at a school in Salem on 17 November, attended by about 350 students, teachers, and parents. **Seattle (USA):** A day-long programme at the centre's retreat, Tapovan, on 7 October. About 300 people attended the programme comprising a talk on Swamiji, devotional music, and the release of a newly published Spanish translation of a book on yoga. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** Talks on Swamiji at two organizations, at Durgapur and Salt Lake in Kolkata, on 1 and 16 November, attended by nearly 650 people in all. **Thiruvananthapuram:** A youth camp for nurses on 18 November, in which 116 nurses participated. **Vijayawada:** A youth convention from 16 to 18 November, in which about 3,500 youths took part.

Monks' Conference

The triennial monks' conference of the Ramakrishna Order was held at Belur Math on 8, 9, and 10 November. In all, 619 monks attended the conference. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, chaired the first, second, and last sessions and gave the inaugural address as well as the benedictory address.

Monks' Conference 2012 at Belur Math



Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Suva, Fiji

New Mission Centres

A sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi**, Fiji, has been started at Suva. The sub-centre, named **Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre**, is located at 24 Lekutu St, Samabula, Suva, Fiji, and its email is suva.rkmfiji@gmail.com. For the time being its postal address will be the same as that of Nadi centre: PO Box 716, Nadi, Fiji, South Pacific.

A branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started at **Bagerhat**, Bangladesh. The address of the centre is Ramakrishna Mission, P C College Road, Bagerhat, Bangladesh 9300; phone: (880) 468-62253; email: *missionbager@gmail.com*.

News from Branch Centres

Sri Pranab Mukherjee, president of India, accompanied by Sri Hansraj Bhardwaj, governor of Karnataka, Sri Jagadish Shettar, chief minister of Karnataka, and several other dignitaries visited the city sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum**, on 11 October. Sri Pranab Mukherjee unveiled a plaque to mark the commencement of the restoration work of Swami Vivekananda Memorial, the house

where Swamiji had stayed for 4 days in October 1892. He also performed Bhumi Puja for the proposed Swami Vivekananda Value Education and Cultural Centre on the adjoining plot of land. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, the president, and the governor and chief minister of Karnataka addressed the public meeting organized on this occasion.

Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, consecrated the new temple, with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at **Ramakrishna Math, Kadapa**, on 22 November, the Jagaddhatri Puja day. An elaborate homa, special worship, discourses, procession, and cultural programmes formed part of the four-day programme held from 20 to 23 November. About 170 monks, including 24 from unaffiliated centres, and 4,000 devotees attended the programmes.

New temple, with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at Kadapa



Swami Suhitananda laid the foundation stone for the proposed staff quarters of **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur**, on 14 October. Vidyamandira College and Sikshanamandira College, both institutions of Saradapitha, have started MSc course in Applied Chemistry and MPhil course in Education, respectively, from the current academic year 2012–3.

The newly set-up permanent exhibition on the Holy Mother at **Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi**, was declared open on 15 October.

The new prayer hall at **Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, was inaugurated on 15 October.

The college at **Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara**, has started MSc course in botany from the current academic year, West Bengal State University having granted autonomy to the college for the course.

The Sunday Religious School of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, Sri Lanka, celebrated its diamond jubilee on 23 September with various programmes. About 1,500 people attended the programmes.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, started an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) with seven trades on 1 October. On 7 November Sri Pranab Mukherjee, president of India, laid the foundation stones for the three proposed buildings—two hostel buildings and one administrative building—for the ITI and also handed over to the ashrama the keys of seven buses and one jeep gifted by the Government of Chhattisgarh.

The newly installed ten-foot-seven-inch statue of Swamiji at the Vivekananda Centenary Assembly Hall in Tapovan, the retreat of **Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle, USA**, was unveiled on 7 October.

Achievements

Nilanjan Ghosh Dastidar, a class-10 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**,

who secured the second rank at the National Science Seminar in 2011, participated as a representative of India in an international science seminar held at Warsaw, Poland, from 14 to 21 September 2012.

Bhagwan Mahaveer Foundation, Chennai, selected **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar**, for the 15th Mahaveer Award for excellence in the sphere of community and social service. Dr K Rosaiah, governor of Tamil Nadu, handed over the award—comprising a citation, an image of Bhagavan Mahavir, and a purse of 1,000,000 rupees—on 10 October at a public function held in Chennai.

The Government of Chhattisgarh selected **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**, for Dr Bhanwar Singh Porte Memorial Award for Tribal Service for the year 2012. Sri Pranab Mukherjee, president of India, handed over the award, comprising a citation, a memento, a shawl, and a purse of 200,000 rupees on 6 November at a public function held in Raipur.

Shivanahalli school, a sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru**, has been awarded Accreditation Certificate by the National Accreditation Board for Education and Training, a wing of the Quality Council of India. Shivanahalli school is the first free rural school to receive this certificate.

Relief


Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Agartala**: 955 children's garments in October; **Antpur**: 406 saris and 14 dhotis on 19 October; **Cooch Behar**: 358 saris, 34 dhotis, and 10 lungis on 11 November; **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh): 576 saris, 300 dhotis, 120 kg flour, 120 kg suji, 120 kg sugar, and 120 kg cooking oil in October; **Gadadhar Ashrama**: 100 saris, 50 pants, 50 shirts, and 50 frocks in October, **Sarisha**: 1,609 saris, 20 frocks, 20 shirts, and 20 pants from 15 October to 4 November.

Earthquake and Tsunami Relief • Japan centre continued its relief work among the families affected by the devastating earthquake and the ensuing tsunami that had struck Japan in March 2011. The following items were distributed among the victims: 1,200 bottles (500 ml each) of Oolong tea and 1,200 bottles (270 ml each) of dishwashing soap in September and October 2011; 20 sewing machines, 30 irons, 50 ironing boards, 120 frying pans, 510 cooking pots, 240 pairs of rain-boots, 7,992 diapers, and 200 tubes of toothpaste in May 2012; and 300 kg rice, 500 boxes of tissue paper, and 540 rolls of toilet paper in September 2012.

Neelam Cyclone Relief • A devastating cyclone, called 'Neelam', struck a major portion of southern India on 30 October 2012. **Chennai Math** immediately conducted primary relief work in the worst-affected districts of Tamil Nadu, mainly Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam. The relief work was conducted in three phases as follows. Phase 1: In all, 51,500 plates of cooked food were served among 10,250 affected people in 12 villages from 2 to 5 November; children were served with milk and biscuits too. Phase 2: 2,208 towels, 1,104 saris, and an equal number of dhotis, bed-sheets, and mats were distributed among 1,104 affected families in Madappuram, Padugai, Kalathidalkarai, Semberi, and Keezhapidagai villages on 5 and 6 November. Phase 3: 1,000 saris and an equal number of dhotis, towels, bed-sheets, and mats were distributed among 1,000 affected families in Mylapore, Vada-pathi, Kovilpathu, Thensarai, Kodiyalathur, Karai Nagar, Prathabharamapuram, Thamaraiikulam, and Kaikatti villages from 9 to 11 November.

Winter Relief • 750 blankets were distributed among needy people through the following centres: **Chandipur**: 250; **Jamtara**: 250; **Lucknow**: 250.

Free Child Eye Care and Eye Camps

Eye camps and child eye care programmes were conducted by several centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. Some of the centres provided patients with free specs and children with vitamins. A cumulative report is given here in two tables, covering the period from 1 December 2011 to 30 November 2012. 

Eye Camps			
Centre	Patients	Specs	Surgeries
Bankura ¹	3,817	472	1,044
Belgaum ¹	2,467	-	990
Chandigarh	265	100	35
Chengalpattu and Chennai Math	995	373	125
Garbeta ²	2,010	195	291
Jamshedpur ¹	490	105	395
Kanpur	334	-	9
Khetri	1,244	-	448
Lucknow	12,847	-	2,355
Madurai	237	45	-
Mayavati	1,158	-	282
Medinipur	388	-	70
Nagpur	219	80	37
Porbandar	1,126	-	238
Puri Mission	507	64	-
Rajkot	2,131	-	927
Ranchi Sanatorium	224	-	45
Salem ¹	4,369	696	84
Saradapitha	400	-	32
Sargachhi	926	-	157
Seva Pratishthan ²	80	-	80
Sikra-Kulingram	56	-	24
Silchar ²	3,987	101	921
Ulsoor	3,070	-	1,464
Vadodara ¹	603	-	86
Varanasi Home of Service	243	-	226
Visakhapatnam	300	-	100
Total	44,493	2,231	10,465

¹ Includes data for November 2011

² Includes data for October and November 2011

Child Eye Care Programmes		
Centre	Children	Specs
Chandigarh ¹	3,725	168
Dehradun	1,513	65
Jamshedpur	3,816	452
Lucknow	14,562	832
Ranchi Morabadi ²	20,909	255
Salem ³	964	30
Thrissur	4,000	79
Vrindaban	6,390	157
Total	55,879	2,038

¹ Includes data for September to November 2011

² Includes data for April to November 2011

³ Includes data for November 2011

Kamarpukur and Jayrambati

by Swami Tejasananda



Sri Ramakrishna and his consort, Sri Sarada Devi, were prophets, unparalleled in the history of spirituality, who have left us a legacy of religious harmony and love much needed in the present era. The places where they were born, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, bear witness to the unique phenomenon of their lives—lives of intense spiritual realization and universal love. The soil, stones, trees, air, and streams of these two pilgrimage centres continue to remind us that here once walked divinities on earth. These places invite us to take a dip in the ocean of spirituality and merge with the source of infinite bliss. This book is a combined edition of two booklets, Holy Kamarpukur and Holy Jayrambati, originally published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Order at Kamarpukur and Jayrambati.

Pages: 76 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 30 | Price: ₹ 50

Ancient Sages

by Swami Satyamayananda

While the present generation works hard for a better future, we should not forget our glorious past and spiritual legacy, as it is pride in our ancestors that inspires us to strive to create a better country for those coming after us. That is why we need to become familiar with the lives of these ancient sages, and it is also why we should pass on this legacy to the coming generations. It is with this in mind that we present this book to our readers. Indian mythology is replete with accounts of sages and seers, so some of these stories have been presented here in a short form.



Pages 224 | Price ₹ 60
Packing & Postage: ₹ 35



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

The Practice of Religion

by Swami Vivekananda

One of the contributions of Swami Vivekananda was to single out the essence of all religions and distinguish it from the non-essentials. 'Religion is realisation', he said. In his lecture 'The Practice of Religion' he points out that we need to be dynamic and practise spiritual disciplines instead of being content with lifeless theories and dogmas. Considering the importance of this lecture, we are now publishing it as a separate booklet and hope that the readers will greatly benefit out of it.

Pages: 32 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 25 | Price: ₹ 8



Vivekananda in Europe

by Swami Vidyatmananda



Swami Vivekananda travelled widely across the world. Many places left a deep impression on him, particularly Europe. His presence too evinced lot of interest among the Europeans which sowed the seeds for the furtherance of Indian thought there. Distanced by time, we have lost many buildings and sites which are no longer in the form they were in during Swami Vivekananda's visit. This book is an attempt to trace his route across Europe and to find out the changes in the places that have taken place since then. The content of this book appeared as a series of articles in the English journal of the Ramakrishna Order, *Prabuddha Bharata*, intermittently from March 1967 to April 1977, and are a result of painstaking research by Swami Vidyatmananda.

Pages 304 | Price ₹ 100
Packing & Postage: ₹ 40



Please write to:

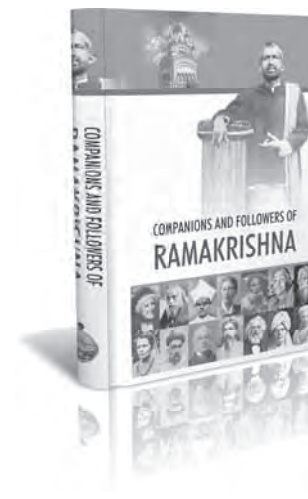
ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Companions and Followers of Ramakrishna

This book contains brief information about 1273 persons who were either companions or followers of Ramakrishna. Some of them do not categorically belong to these two groups and can be said to be mere acquaintances. Its importance lies in the fact that, along with the important ones it also keeps before us information about many a lesser known characters from Ramakrishna's life as well as about his later followers. Released on the occasion of the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna it will facilitate serious readers who want to know especially about the lesser-known characters which find mention in Ramakrishna's literature as well as tradition.

Pages: 696 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 40 | Price: ₹ 220

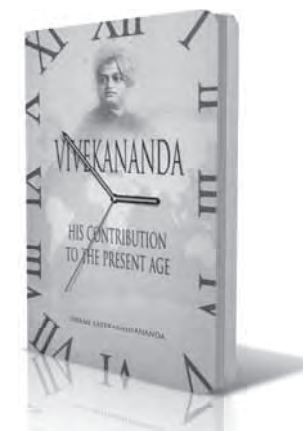


Vivekananda

His Contribution to the Present Age

by Swami Satprakashananda

Swami Vivekananda is a name which brings to us the images of a saint, a prophet, a reformer, a humanist, and much more. Translating the teachings of his master Sri Ramakrishna, into philosophy and precept, the Swami shifted the focus of religion from celestial beings to human beings. The true significance of his work is brought home to us only when we see his work on the larger timeline of the religio-philosophical history of the world. This is precisely what Swami Satprakashananda does in this volume and thus effectively delineates the contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the present age.



Pages 282 | Price ₹ 85
Packing & Postage: ₹ 35



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Chicago Addresses of Swami Vivekananda

An Audiobook



Produced by Advaita Ashrama in collaboration with Saregama Ltd, this is an audiobook containing readings of the addresses of Swami Vivekananda delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893. It contains the comments of various thinkers on Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions and an introduction to the audiobook. The speeches have been read by Sri Biplab Ganguli. The comments have been read by Sri Masoodul Haq and the introduction has been given by Swami Atmarupananda.

Price: ₹ 99 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 50

Strength Is Life

Ebooks by Swami Vivekananda

This CD contains the e-book files of six books by Swami Vivekananda: *Buddha and His Message*, *Personality Development*, *Essentials of Hinduism*, *Chicago Addresses*, *My Idea of Education*, *Rebuild India*. All popular e-book formats are included and these files can be read by nearly all e-book readers and tablets. Containing an user-friendly interface this disk can be used in Windows and Mac Operating Systems.



Price ₹ 100
Packing & Postage: ₹ 50



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22866483, Email: mail@advaitaashrama.org

UTTARAYAN
THE NEW TOWNSHIP

SILIGURI



LUXMI TOWNSHIP LIMITED

Kishore Bhavan, 17, R N Mukherjee Road, Kolkata 700 001
Tel: (91)(33) 2248 4437, 2248 4227, Fax: (91)(33)2243 0177,
Email: luxmitea@vsnl.com

SUR IRON & STEEL CO (P) LTD

15, Convent Road, Kolkata 700 014
Email:suriron@suriron.com

LET US BUILD A HOSPITAL

A branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, this centre runs the oldest Eye Infirmary in Bihar. Now we are constructing an Eye, ENT, Dental Hospital cum Diagnostic Centre to cater to the needs of the poor and deserving local population.

Present Infrastructure: Oldest Eye Infirmary (thirty-bedded) in North Bihar established in 1947, with departments of General dispensary, Dental, Homeopathy, X-Ray, Pathology, now dilapidated. Newly purchased Ophthalmic equipment like Yag, Green Laser, Fundus Camera, Perimeter, Phaco etc are being used regularly. No. of OPD patients increased from 50 to 140 daily, OPD hours increased from 3 hours to 6 hours. Daily evening Eye Surgery, 3 residential surgeons all the time.

Our Vision: Speciality in Eye, ENT and Dentistry, Various OPD Sections, Well equipped Operation Theatres, Clinical Lab, R & D Section, Modern Diagnostics, Paramedical Training, and Doctors' and Staff Quarters.

Cost of First Phase

of Construction:	Construction of Medical Building (13,000 sq. ft.) (Remaining)	₹ 50 lakh
	Construction of Doctors' Quarters	₹ 60 lakh
	Equipment and Maintenance	₹ 65 lakh
	Permanent Fund	₹ 1 crore

Work in Progress: Foundation stone laid on 1 January 2011 (Kalpataru Day). Foundation work completed on 30 June 2011. Plinth work completed in December 2011. Roof casting done.

We earnestly appeal to you to donate liberally towards the development of the infrastructure of health for the poor. Your contribution may be sent through cheque/DD/MO favouring 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur' or by transferring the amount to SBI A/c. No.10877071752; IFS Code : SBIN0006016 with an intimation by email. All donations are exempt from the Income tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act. Your contribution towards the project for a place like Muzaffarpur, Bihar where health infrastructure is very poor and people deserve your help will be palpably a real homage to Swami Vivekananda whose heart bled for poor humanity.

Swami Bhavatmananda
Secretary



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION SEVASHRAMA

(A branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission, PO Belur Math, Dt. Howrah, West Bengal)

Swami Vivekananda Path, Bela, Muzaffarpur, Bihar-843 116, Phone: 0621-2272127 / 2272963 Email: rkm.muzaffarpur@gmail.com Website: www.rkmmuzaffarpur.org

The Indian Press Private Limited

OFFSET PRINTERS

Registered Office: 93 A, Lenin Sarani, Kolkata 700 013

Phone: 033-2265 6924/5265/6061

Email: indianpress@alliancekolkata.com

WE PRINT WITH DEVOTION

SINCE 1941

PAUL'S ENGINEERING WORKS (P) LTD

REGISTERED UNDER SSI AND NSIC

PIONEER MANUFACTURER OF GRADE-1 DOG CHUCK IN INDIA



7 Natabar Paul Road, Belgachia, Howrah,

West Bengal 711 105

Phone: 033-2651 8465 • Mobile: 9804403928 / 9804084859



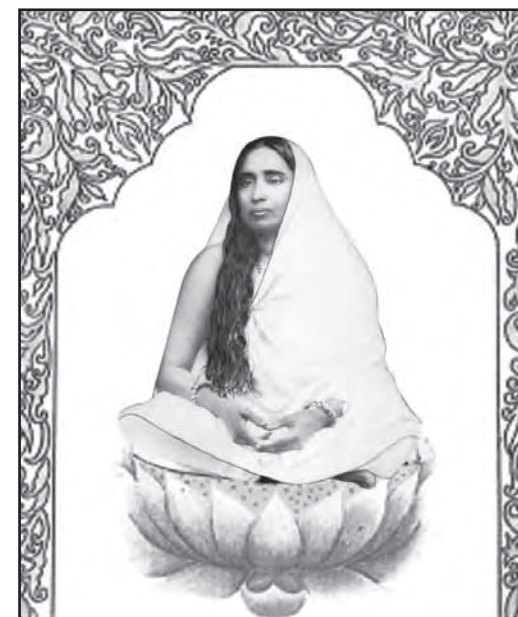
SRIMA Group

Fire & Safety Systems

** ISO 9001-2008 Certified **



Regn. No. : QAIC/IN/275



Distributors in India for:

'JUSTRITE' Manufacturing Co. Llc. Illinois, USA.

Safe Storage & Handling Systems for Hazardous Chemicals

Safety Cabinets • Safety Cans • Spill Control Pallets, etc.

Design & Manufacture:

Fire Resistant Safety Storage Cabinets • Doors, Panels, and Partitions

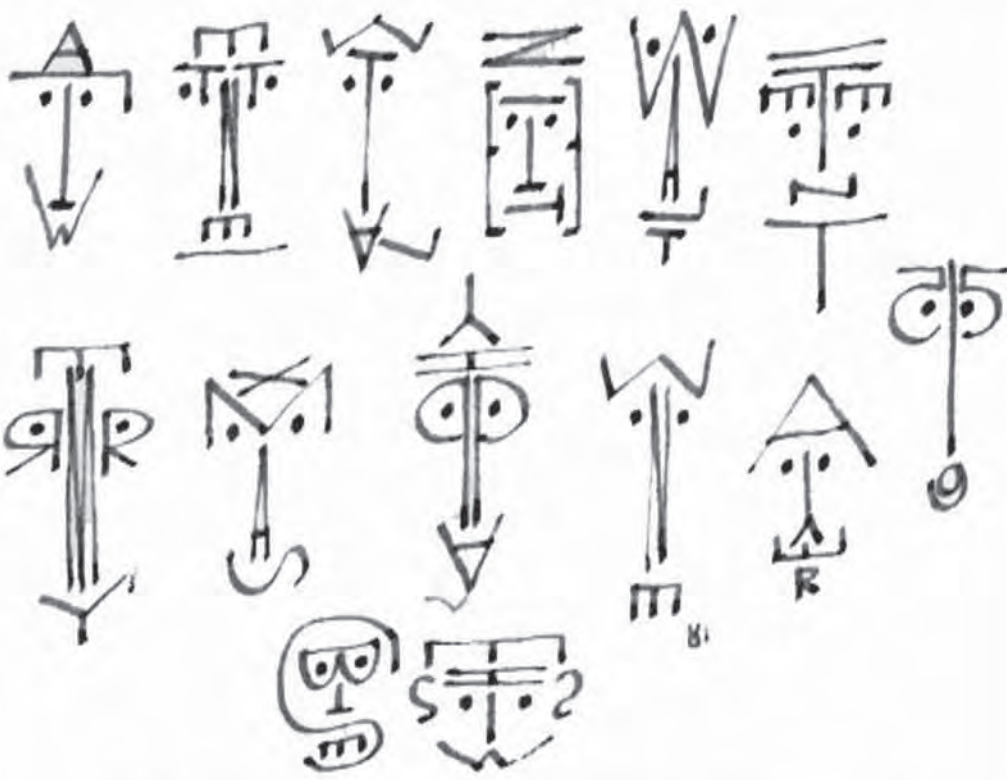
Fire Sealants and Fire Dampers

HMPS, Air Seal, and Panic Doors • Motorised Gates / Shutters

64, Shalaka, D N Nagar, Andheri (W), Mumbai 400 053.

Phone: 022-2292 6744 Fax : 2670 7586 • Email: srima@srima.in / srima@mtnl.net.in

Website: www.srima.in / www.srimasalesandservices.com



“ Glad Greetings, Bright Hopes and
a Happy New Year to you.”

URC Educational Trust
www.urcschool.com

URC Construction (P) Ltd
www.urcindia.com

URC Infotec (P) Ltd
www.urcinfotec.com

URC Creative Developers (P) Ltd
www.urccreative.com

Unselfishness is more paying, only
people have not the patience to
practise it.

—*Swami Vivekananda*—

Rural Engineering Co P Ltd

AE 339 Salt Lake
Kolkata 700 064
033 2359 9801/0 fx 2359 9803

Railway Sleeper Plant
Sambhupura 312 612
rungtas@vsnl.com

9001 : 2000 ISO 14001 : 2004

EAPL

**Translating the Promise of Technology,
into Performance.**



Electronic Timers Tachometers
Counters Temperature Controllers
Time Switch Phase Monitoring Device
Power Supply Modules Annunciator
Energy Meters

They all top the list of consultants and firms including M/S EIL Delhi, M/s Bhel and DGQA for defense application. Nationwide dealers' network, a string of sub-dealers, ISO 9001 standards and UL (US) certification, National award as an outstanding manufacturer; in fact, it is laurels all the way.

ON HIGH DEMAND BY REPUTED INDUSTRIES AND VARIOUS BUILDERS
EAPL ELECTRONIC TIMERS

**Time, Temperature both
captivated the primitive mind
thanks to technology...
for some at least, it's has become
a passion to control them.**

EAPL turned gifted intuitions into systematic research, resulting in inventions that ticked at the heart of any industry. Right from the days of its beginning, EAPL has been in a self-exploration to discover and resolve how time and temperature puzzle the mechanical world.

A 5255  ISO 9001 - 2008
ELECTRONIC AUTOMATION (P) LTD
In collaboration with **KRUGER** Krüger Holding AG
20, K.H.B Industrial Area, Yelahanka, Bangalore-560 064
Tel.: +91- 80- 4280 2345 / 2856 7561 / 2856 7562
Fax: 080 - 4280 2346. E-mail: info@eaplindiamail.com

www.eaplindia.com

Electronic Timers | Tachometers | Counters | Temperature Controllers | Time Switch | Phase Monitoring Device | SMPS | Annunciator | Energy Meters





**PEERLESS GROUP IN DIVERSE FIELDS OF SERVICE SECTOR
PARTNERING NATIONAL PROGRESS TO MAKING LIFE BETTER**

A multifaceted corporate conglomerate Peerless Group is predominantly present in diverse fields of service sector - from financial service to *healthcare*, from *hospitality* to *housing*. On the one hand **Peerless Funds Management Co. Ltd.**, the only Mutual Fund company in Eastern India and headquartered at Kolkata has launched a bouquet of its own Mutual Fund products, on the other, **Peerless Securities Ltd.** provides a slew of services including stock broking and deposit advisory services and the likes from 50 outlets across the country.

Apart from distributing Life Insurance, General Insurance and Mutual Fund products, **Peerless Developers Ltd.** is engaged in developing housing complexes for the common people at affordable price. **Bengal Peerless Housing Development Co. Ltd.** (a joint sector with West Bengal Housing Board) is a renowned institution in real estate today. In the hospitality sector **The Peerless Inn** stands as a landmark in the heart of the city with its pioneering and authentic Bengali cuisine restaurant **Aaheli**. In healthcare **Peerless Hospital & B K Roy Research Centre** has been selected as one of the top five most caring hospitals in India by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Govt. of India in 2009 and one of the top four private hospitals in Kolkata for clinical excellence by THE WEEK-HANSA Research Survey in 2010.

The Peerless General Finance & Investment Company Limited
Peerless Bhawan, 3 Esplanade East, Kolkata 700 069
Ph: 033 22483247 • Website: www.peerless.co.in

 **Peerless**
Smart Financial Solutions

3346, 2011

Managing Editor: Swami Bodhasarananda. **Editor:** Swami Satyamayananda. **Printed by:** Swami Atmalokananda at Gipidi Box Co., Kolkata 700 014 and published by him for Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati) from Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, on 1 January 2013.